BROKEN BODIES AT PLAY: PHYSICAL COMEDY AND IRONIC BODIES IN HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S DRAMAS

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Abstract

The present dissertation examines broken bodies in the plays of the German dramatist Heinrich von Kleist, applying a particular focus on the movements, gestures and, most importantly, fractures and injuries of these bodies to propose their fragmentation and brokenness as a form of physical comedy and a unique conceptualization of corporeal irony. Three plays, *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*, *Der zerbrochne Krug* and *Penthesilea*, exemplify Kleist's distinctive use of organic and inorganic broken bodies as vehicles for the representation and performance of both ironic and comic effects. The approach adopted here is mostly informed by literary theory, literary aesthetics, theories of laughter and the comic, profiting mainly from the formulations of Paul de Man, Friedrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller. Putting these theories into dialogue with Kleist's plays, I argue that he creates his own often complex form of physical comedy, achieved through the fractures, movements and appearances of the bodies, and invents an equally complex form of materialized bodily irony that lies outside the understanding of irony as a rhetorical device. I further contend that the representations and performances of Kleist's broken bodies challenge theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this time, as detailed in the central three chapters. Adam and the titular pitcher are two broken bodies that critique dysfunctional power structures, while Käthchen's leap from her window, fracturing her own legs, weighs in on contemporaneous ideals of femininity. The descriptions and staging of Penthesilea's and Achilles's bodies evoke comic effects, ultimately questioning categorizations of genre, while also challenging the distinction between passivity and agency by fashioning situations of both voluntary and involuntary irony. Through close readings of the selected plays – in particular, of the fragmented and injured bodies therein –

I conclude that Kleist not only develops and articulates his own form of irony and comedy through literary and theatrical means but also that he uses these inventions to critique prevailing social structures, gender norms and value systems at the turn of the nineteenth century in addition to broader questions of genre classifications.

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Introduction

Corporeality is a central element of Kleist's work. Throughout his oeuvre, bodies are tortured in unexpected ways. They are tormented, ripped open, torn apart, shattered to pieces or pieced together, and we find body parts, like a finger or a breast, amputated. His first work, *Die Familie Schroffenstein* (1803), places physicality literally front and center, by displaying a lifeless body in the middle of the scene. An open casket, surrounded by other characters dominates the opening of the play: the corpse, the mere physical remains, marks the central place held by the body in Kleist's work.[1] Scholarship has consequently devoted substantial attention to the body in Kleist, with an eye to the evidently violent treatment of bodies in both his prose and dramas. In this regard, scholarly research offers a seemingly exhaustive discussion of the theme.[2] So why should one contribute yet another study to an already copious body of research? Have not we heard enough about bodies in Kleist?

With the present study, I will examine a perspective that has, to my knowledge, largely been overlooked, namely, the body – and especially the injured body – as a medium to articulate and perform irony and comic effects. Throughout the discussion, irony and the comic will be largely considered alongside each other. Rather than considering their relationship, the focus will lie on ways in which the body reflects and performs irony and the comic respectively.

The *Äthethische Grundbegriffe* states: "Im Komischen werden für die Wahrnehmung inkongruente Kontexte über zwei- oder mehrwertige Bezüge auf eine ungewohnte Weise überraschend miteinander kombiniert, so daß plötzlich eine Durchlässigkeit zwischen diesen

[1] See the stage directions to act one of the first scene (*SW*, p. 51): "Es steht ein Sarg in der Mitte; um ihn herum Rupert, Eustache, Ottokar, Jeronimus, Ritter, Geistliche, das Hofgesinde und ein Chor von Jünglingen und Mädchen."
[2] See, for example, Moser; and Chołuj.

Kontexten erscheint."[3] Here, the entry to "comic" ("Komisch") considers the element of incongruence at the core of the comic effect. It is through the combination of two (or more) incongruent or dissonant components that the comic is perceived and the affect of laughter is evoked. When discussing the comic with respect to the broken body, this incongruity, the discrepancy that causes a humorous effect, will play a central part.[4] As my study will show, Kleist's broken bodies reflect this incongruity predominantly through their fractures, but also through their movements and appearances onstage.

In her book *Irony's Antics*, Erika Weitzman argues that "[t]here is hardly an examination of the phenomenon of irony that does not eventually find itself having to pay heed to the question of comic, and, by the same token, there is almost no discussion of the comic, comedy, humor, or the joke that manages to avoid using the word 'irony'" (21). In this study, we will see this overlap of comedy and irony primarily in the broken body, but also specifically in the notion of incongruence that the broken body often represents. As I will show in the second chapter, incongruence evokes a decidedly comic effect in *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*, where the contemporaneous discourse of maidenly grace is comically incongruous with the title character's headlong leap out a window. Such an incongruous overlap is also vital to the interpretation of ironic elements related to the body in *Der zerbrochne Krug*, where the wounds from a fraudulent judge's own scandalous altercation can be fruitfully interpreted with respect to his official role in

[3] *ÄGB* 3: 333.

[4] It should be noted that not just any incongruity can evoke a humorous effect. Jerry Farber discusses the difference between incongruous elements that do and do not evoke a humorous effect. Farber suggests that what causes incongruence to be deemed funny is the result of a process in which "[t]he linked, incongruous A and B in the humorous situation achieve an immediate, if only temporary ascendance of" "the strong need for inclination" over "an internalized constraint or obstacle" (69). The moment of immediacy is important here. An incongruity that is perceived as funny can be resolved quickly, unlike a riddle that offers us an incongruence not easily resolved. As John Willmann describes it, "The humorous incongruities […] are easy to 'see through'" (77). Willmann further describes non-humorous incongruences as "real; they are puzzling to understand. Or they deal with serious matters" (77). The following discussion will consider only those incongruous elements that either evoke a humorous effect (as it will be discussed in relation to theories of laughter and incongruity) or that can be linked to the notion of irony.

the court of law. Within the discussion of irony, incongruity and the ability to disrupt are key aspects analyzed in this study. Irony, as the first chapter will lay out in more detail, has the power to interrupt, which we see, for example, in the permanent parabasis described by Friedrich Schlegel, the constant and illusion-breaking interruption of the work of art or – in Paul de Man's words – "the interruption of discourse" (178).

While irony is often discussed as a rhetorical mode, the present study will look at ways in which the bodies in Kleist can be read as a materialized, physical form of irony. My project is therefore interested in questions surrounding the possibilities of irony intended as more than a rhetorical device. How does Kleist create this kind of physical irony? How does it manifest in the bodies? What is the shape of these bodies? Are they organic or manufactured? And how is this kind of irony articulated through the text? As I engage with these questions, I will rely on two major notions of irony: the Romantic irony, as conceptualized by Friedrich Schlegel, and Paul de Man's deconstructionist approach. In doing so, I seek to explore how Kleist's irony relates to this theoretical and conceptual structure.

The thought of a materialized irony is not new. For instance, Diego Velázquez's famous painting *Las Meninas* (Fig. 1), although created before the Romantic period, reveals distinct features attributed to Romantic irony, as clearly elucidated by Marika Müller: "[In] *Las* Meninas läßt sich deutlich eine vorromantische ironische Ästhetik ablesen […]. Es enthält Merkmale sämtlicher prototypischer Ausdrucksformen des Ironischen: stilistische Auslassungen, Anspielungen auf die Parabase" (47).

Fig. 1: *Las Meninas* (1656), by Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599-1660), 318 x 276 cm. © Museo Nacional del Prado

This intriguing and almost life-size painting portrays a scene that takes place in a room of a palace. At the center of the lower register, court servants, little people, and a dog that is lying before them surround Infanta Margaret Theresa, the young daughter of King Philip IV of Spain. Light enters the picture through a window on the right, casting its glow on their faces. Noticeably, only the princess's face is completely illuminated, free from any shadow. On the left

side, slightly behind the group, Velázquez himself is painting. The viewer can only see the back of the canvas, an invention which recalls the enormous size of *Las Meninas* itself.[5] Darkness seems to dominate the matrix of the painting. As a result, it is impossible to make out the content of the numerous frames crowding the walls. Two focal points in the back nonetheless command attention: an open door onto a bright staircase revealing a servant looking back at the scene, and a mirror on the far wall bearing the reflection of King Philip IV and his wife, Mariana of Austria.

The artist's inclusion of himself in the portrait is, as Müller observes, "der am deutlichsten erkennbare Ironiegestus" (44). To use Friedrich Schlegel's words, by revealing himself as the artist of the painting, Velázquez is "represent[ing] the producer along with the product."[6] The artist's self-inclusion is one of the major tropes of the Romantic period as elucidated by Hans Feger: "Die romantische Ironie, [reinterpretiert] diese Lehrmethode als ästhetisches Verfahren, d.h. als ein Verfahren, in welchem die Produktionsbedingungen von Kunst im Kunstwerk selbst reflektiert werden" (69). This is not to say that Velázquez deliberately created a piece of art in an aesthetic tradition that was yet to come. Rather, the statement emphasizes the establishment of literary aesthetics, seen in Schlegel's concept of Romantic irony, as a development of previous works of art that served as precursors.[7]

The painter, however, is not only representing himself in the painting – he is also looking at us, the spectators who look back at his art. With his gaze he breaks the illusion of the painting and thus engages in a form of ironic parabasis (Müller 44). But the break in fact tears further. By not revealing what is painted on the large canvas to the left, Velázquez only lets us see its reverse, leading us to speculate that we are actually the subjects of the painting. With this

[5] The original canvas measures 318 x 276 cm. See *Kindlers Malerei Lexikon*, 5: 645.
[6] *KFSA* 2: 204: "das Produzierende mit dem Produkt darstellen." Unless marked otherwise, all English quotations of Schlegel will follow Peter Firchow's translation; here, see Firchow, p. 195.
[7] See Müller, p. 46: "Vorgreifend sei darauf hingewiesen, daß die Romantiker ihren Begriff der ironischen Ästhetik ebenfalls aus vorgängigen Werken ableiteten, deren Autoren selbst sich nicht theoretisch mit dem Begriff der Ironie auseinandersetzten." See also Beus, p. 21.

possibility, the illusion-breaking becomes aggressive. As Müller argues, the spectators are "robbed" (45) of their passive role: they are pulled into the painting, become an active part of it. The viewers of the painting are thus not only made aware of their role as viewers but are interacting – perhaps unwillingly – with the work of art.

How does Velázquez's aggressive and even implicating visual irony relate to the following discussion of Kleist's plays? Does Kleist address or even "pull in" the spectator? My close readings of the selected plays suggest that he does in fact address the spectators, through his commentary and critique implicit in the dramas. In *Der zerbrochne Krug*, for example, through the use of physical irony and the presentation of the broken pitcher through Frau Marthe, Kleist is making us reflect on ourselves and our flaws, and in *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*, he pokes fun at bourgeois patriarchal values and thus mocks who subscribes to them.

Although *Las Meninas* does not relate to questions of the broken body, it still serves as a ready example of an irony that is not bound to verbal or literary modes. This dissertation is interested in this specific unbound aspect of irony and, by looking at Kleist's utilization of irony, I intend to shed light on the ways in which he creates a materialized, physical irony that breaches the boundaries between literary and theatrical means, between the word and the body.

When considering the broken body in Kleist's plays, my focus will not lie on irony alone, but will also discuss it in tandem with accounts of the comic. My analysis of comic effects will mostly be grounded in the theoretical works of August Wilhelm Schlegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, Immanuel Kant, and Henri Bergson, whose notions of the comic and laughter, delineated in greater detail in the following chapters, provide constructive approaches to physical comic effects in Kleist's plays. In this regard, the focus will be the theory on incongruity expounded by Schopenhauer and Kant – namely, the comic effect evoked in the sudden perception of

incongruity between two components – and comic elements of human gesture and movement vis-à-vis mechanical movement, seen in the writings of Bergson, to be considered humorous through their rigid motion in contrast to the expected elasticity of the human body.

Given its focus on the ways Kleist develops and deploys this form of comic through the body, this study will also consider violence and violent treatment of the bodies, with an eye to the persistence of the comic element in the face of bodily violence and cruelty. What is comical about a girl breaking her legs or a Greek warrior bitten to death? As I will argue, these scenes are better understood as comical, precisely on account of their savagery, rather than in spite of it.

When examining Kleist's plays in light of physical irony and its comical effects, I will also discuss the use of these literary and theatrical devices as means of social commentary and critique, especially of bourgeois norms as exemplified by Friedrich Schiller's notion of "the beautiful soul." In his philosophical essay *Über Anmut und Würde*, Schiller formulates this aesthetic idea as the synthesis of moral rectitude and natural beauty. It is my aim to show how Kleist critiques this idealistic concept of human grace and harmony through his aestheticization of the body. Consequently, in the following chapters, I will analyze how Kleist's plays relate to and engage with the values set forth by Schiller, how Kleist positions his literature and theater in relation to these values, and how his plays (through the broken body) critically engage with them.

The three plays which will be subject to the following discussion are the comedy *Der zerbrochne Krug*, the tragedy *Penthesilea*, and *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*, which Kleist designated a "*knightly spectacle*," and cannot easily be categorized into either of the conventional literary genres. I am using the classification of tragedy and comedy with some approximation here, as scholarly consensus has settled that Kleist breaks and redefines normative

boundaries of genre classification and as it will also be shown in this study. The *Krug* contains characteristics of a tragedy – not at least due to the close connection to Sophocles's tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, which is already stated in the preface of the text itself – and *Penthesilea*, as we also see it in this study, has a comic side. It is my aim to explore physical irony and comedy irrespective of genre in order to verify if and how their representation or performance differs among them.

Although there are studies that recognize and interpret irony or the comic in Kleist's work, these are more focused on his prose rather than his dramatic works. Moreover, to my knowledge, none of the scholarship in this field of research recognizes the decidedly physical aspect to both Kleist's irony and comedy.[8] While also exclusively discussing Kleist's prose, Michael Moering's book *Witz und Ironie in der Prosa Heinrich von Kleists* is the only text known to me that considers both Kleist's irony and humoristic elements, exploring the notion of wit (*Witz*) with regard to its meaning and understanding in the eighteenth century.[9] In his comprehensive essay *Irony Ironized: Heinrich von Kleist's Narrative Stance and Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Irony*, which I will discuss in the first chapter, Bernd Fischer interprets Kleist's adverse attitude toward religion as one of the cornerstones of the poet's irony. According to Fischer, this hostile stance sets Kleistian irony apart from the prevailing Romantic notion of irony formulated by Schlegel.

My exploration of specific aspects of physical irony and comedy in Kleist's plays, in sum, will contribute significantly to the scholarship on Kleist and will draw attention to a still underrepresented area of research within the field. The first chapter, a discussion of the

[8] See, for example, Moering; Fischer; and Seyhan.
[9] See Moering, p. 8: "Es soll versucht werden zu zeigen, wie nahe manche dieser Formen einerseits dem kommen, was heute unter (einem) Witz verstanden wird, und wie sie andererseits dem entsprechen, was man im 18. Jahrhunders mit „Witz" bezeichnet hat, nämlich das – aus Scharfsinn und Phantasie zusammengesetzte – dichterische Vermögen überhaupt."

theoretical framework on irony and the comic, will set the stage for my close readings. Physical comedy in Kleist's *Käthchen von Heilbronn* is the focus of the second chapter, while the bodily representations of irony in *Der zerbrochne Krug* are at the center of discussion of the third chapter. The fourth and final chapter of this dissertation will explore aspects of both, irony and the comic, as they are represented and performed through the bodies of the protagonists in *Penthesilea*.

1 Theoretical Framework

Irony: Between Truth and Trope

Where to begin approaching a concept as complex and with so rich a history as irony? Its understanding has changed considerably over the years, meaning something different today than it did centuries ago, and it also comes in different forms, from Socratic irony to irony as an aesthetic, literary technique of irony, from dramatic to verbal irony. It is thus increasingly difficult to grasp irony as a single concept beyond the general and most common understanding of the word today: verbal irony, the use of words to express a meaning contrary to their literal meaning. But the concept of irony as a primarily literary and rhetorical term can be traced through a long history of different understandings and interpretations, from Greek drama up to German romanticism to postmodernism, from philosophy to literary theory, with its beginnings in Greek comedy. In Aristophanes's plays, irony appears as a derogatory term, referring to the sophists' "art of disguise" and "mimic and gestic play" (*ÄGB* 197). The *eiron* character is the "clever underdog," a counterpart to the sincerely foolish *alazon* (O'Connor and Behler). At the end of the ancient comedy, the *eiron* defeats the *alazon* in a sort of ritual that the audience would have already known to expect as soon as the impostor *alazon* enters the stage (Thomson 4ff). It will be through Plato that the term *eironeia* enters the field of philosophy as a form of pretend ignorance, as we see it in Socrates's dialogues, before becoming a part of rhetoric as the trope *ironia*, found in Quintilian and writers of the Middle Ages and Renaissance (*ÄGB* 197).

The most influential and lasting conceptualization of *irony* in the field of German literature and philosophy was conceptualized through Kleist's contemporary Friedrich

Schlegel.[10] Particularly his fragments, which will play a central part in this study, create a concept of irony that is to be understood within literary criticism. Before the instantiation of irony in Romanticism, its tradition in German literature had only been very limited. While Schlegel's work is roundly understood as representative of the understanding of Romantic irony, the term *irony* never finds a clear conceptualization in any one place. It is "defined" mainly through a number of fragments in the *Lyceum* (1797), the *Athenaeum* (1798), as well as a few other fragments and pieces of writing.[11] One of Schlegel's most frequently cited and discussed fragments states that "[d]ie Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbase" ("Irony is a permanent parabasis").[12] The term "Parekbase" is derived from the Greek word *ekbasis*, which translates to a "going out of," even an "escape" (Liddell and Scott, s. v. "ekbasis"). Following this, irony in this fragment is characterized through its ability to "step out" and interrupt.

As often as the *Lyceum* and *Athenaeum* are referenced when speaking about irony, it is surprising to find only a few mentions of "Ironie" in them: four in the *Lyceum* and seven in the *Athenaeum.*[13] Looking at these fragments and his thoughts on irony, one can see how Schlegel considers irony deeply connected with classical literature and philosophy. This is not unexpected, since Schlegel's way of thinking is rooted in these fields. As Peter Szondi puts it,

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[10] According to the *ÄGB*, Johann Christoph Gottsched was the first German writer to introduce irony as one of four tropes ("verblümte Redensarten") in his 1736 "Ausführliche Redekunst": "Wir kommen endlich auf die Ironie, oder auf die Verspottung, als die vierte Gattung der verblümten Redensarten. Auch hier hat es Statt, daß die Wörter neue Bedeutungen bekommen, indem man in der Ironie gerade das Gegentheil von dem sagt, was man denket. Der Zuhörer muß es aber aus den Umständen schon wissen, oder aus dem Tone der Sprache abnehmen können, was gemeynet ist" (283).

[11] In 1797, Schlegel joined Johann Friedrich Reichardt to work on his recently created journal *Lyceum der schönen Künste* in which he published his "Kritische Fragmente," widely known as the "Lyceums Fragmente" ("*Lyceum* fragments"). Only a year later, he and his brother August Wilhelm started their own journal with the title *Athenäum*, where Schlegel published his Athenäums-Fragmente" (Endres 8ff and 141ff). "Irony" also appears in Schlegel's philosophical fragments and his text *Über die Unverständlichkeit.*

[12] See Philosophisches Fragment 668 in *KFSA* 18: 85. All translations mine, as here, unless otherwise specified.

[13] *Lyceum* Fragments 7, 42, 48 and 108; and *Athenäum* fragments 51, 121, 253, 362, 418 and 431.

"Fr. Schlegels Gedankenwelt erhält ihren inneren Zusammenhang durch ihr geschichtsphilosophisches Wesen" ("Friedrich Schlegel" 397).

Schlegel is known for shaping aesthetics in Kleist's times and in the German Romantic period at large and an exhaustive study of his concept of irony would far exceed the scope of this discussion. But a few examples taken from his work, while drawing mostly on Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs's comprehensive study on Romantic irony, *Die romantische Ironie in Text und Gestaltung*, can outline the main ideas that shape his notion of irony and inform my larger considerations of irony in Kleist's work. In her reading of the fragment "Irony is a permanent parabasis," Strohschneider-Kohrs writes, "die Ironie [kann] erscheinen als eine Durchbrechung und freie Behandlung der gegenständlichen Darstellung, - als ein Sich-Herauslösen aus den vordergründigen Darstellungsmitteln" (20). She discusses this fragment in connection with *Lyceum* Fragment 42, where Schlegel writes:

> Es gibt alte und moderne Gedichte, die durchgängig im Ganzen und überall den göttlichen Hauch der Ironie atmen. Es lebt in ihnen eine wirklich transzendentale Buffonerie. Im Innern, die Stimmung, welche alles übersieht, und sich über alles Bedingte unendlich erhebt, auch über eigne Kunst, Tugend, oder Genialität: im Äußern, in der Ausführung die mimische Manier eines gewöhnlichen guten italiänischen Buffo.[14]

With both parabasis and the buffo, Strohschneider-Kohrs convincingly argues, Schlegel stresses a breach in representation. This disruption, as this study will lay out in more detail, is one of the characteristics of irony that I want to center in my reading of Kleist's plays. Although Kleist's irony results in more physical and often violent disruptions, it is, like Schlegel's irony, shaped

[14] *KFSA* 2: 152: "There are ancient and modern poems that are pervaded by the divine breath of irony throughout and informed by a truly transcendental buffoonery. Internally: the mood that surveys everything and rises infinitely above all limitations, even above its own art, virtue, or genius; externally, in its execution: the mimic style of an averagely gifted Italian *buffo.*" Unless marked otherwise, all following quotations of Schlegel will be taken from the Firchow translation, as here.

through a repeated inter-ruption (from Latin *interruptio*, a "breaking up," a "division").[15] We, as readers and audience, witness a constant breaking and bursting throughout his work.

Judging from his texts, Schlegel himself was quite aware of the difficulty to define a single theory of irony. His ironic text *Über die Unverständlichkeit* offers not only a commentary on his own *Athenaeum*, addressing its "incomprehensibility" but also serves as an almost unparalleled example of the complexity of irony, its elusiveness, and its proliferation:

> Ein großer Teil von der Unverständlichkeit des »Athenaeums« liegt unstreitig in der *Ironie,* die sich mehr oder minder überall darin äußert. […] Um die Übersicht vom ganzen System der Ironie zu erleichtern, wollen wir einige der vorzüglichsten Arten anführen. Die erste und vornehmste von allen ist die grobe Ironie. […] Dann kommt die feine oder die delikate Ironie; dann die extrafeine […]. Diese Sorte wird auch wohl bei Dichtern gefunden, wie ebenfalls die redliche Ironie […]. Ferner die dramatische Ironie […]. Endlich die Ironie der Ironie. Im allgemeinen ist das wohl die gründlichste Ironie der Ironie, daß man sie doch eben auch überdrüssig wird, wenn sie uns überall und immer wieder geboten wird. Was wir aber hier zunächst unter Ironie der Ironie verstanden wissen wollen, das entsteht auf mehr als einem Wege. Wenn man ohne Ironie von der Ironie redet, wie es soeben der Fall war; wenn man mit Ironie von einer Ironie redet, ohne zu merken, daß man sich zu eben der Zeit in einer andren viel auffallenderen Ironie befindet; wenn man nicht wieder aus der Ironie herauskommen kann, wie es in diesem Versuch über die Unverständlichkeit zu sein scheint; wenn die Ironie Manier wird, und so den Dichter gleichsam wieder ironiert; wenn man Ironie zu einem überflüssigen Taschenbuche versprochen hat, ohne seinen Vorrat vorher zu überschlagen und nun wider Willen Ironie machen muß, wie ein Schauspielkünstler der Leibschmerzen hat; *wenn die Ironie wild wird, und sich gar nicht mehr regieren läßt.*[16]

[15] See Lewis et al., "interruptio."

[16] *KFSA* 2: 368ff: "A great part of the incomprehensibility of the *Athenaeum* is unquestionably due to the *irony* that to a greater or lesser extent is to be found anywhere in it. [...] In order to facilitate a survey of the whole system of irony, we would like to mention here a few of the choicest kinds. The first and most distinguished of all is coarse irony. [...] Next there is fine or delicate irony; then extra-fine. [...] This kind of irony is also found in poets, as well as straightforward irony [...]. Further, dramatic irony […] Finally, there is the irony of irony. Generally speaking, the most fundamental irony of irony probably is that even it becomes tiresome if we are always being confronted tight it. But what we want this irony to mean in the first place is something that happens in more ways than one. For example, if one speaks of irony without using it, as I have just done; if one speaks of irony ironically without in the process being aware of having fallen into a far more noticeable irony; if one can't disentangle oneself from irony

But what Schlegel offers in this deeply ironic text, is nothing close to the "survey of the system of irony" that it proclaims to provide (*KFSA* 2: 369).

What follows is instead a convoluted cluster of ironies, or, as Joseph Dane puts it in his analysis of this essay, a "whimsical catalog" of ironies (115). Although it is introduced as a "survey" to help readers through the incomprehensible manifold of ironies, it quickly turns into an overwhelming proliferation of ironies. There is no system. Instead, irony "grows wild and can't be controlled any longer." Dane argues that Schlegel traps himself here, but I think it is also the reader who gets equally trapped in this unruly proliferation.[17] Soon after beginning to read this paragraph, the reader gets wrapped up and lost in the net of ironies, not able to tell where one irony ends and the next begins. Irony reveals itself as mysterious and elusive. Thus, with this essay Schlegel gives us an example of this elusive and unruly character by embracing it as method to create the text.

Through this elusiveness, the incomprehensibility of irony can be preserved and it is incomprehensibility that is most indispensable in order to protect the work of art from "blasphemous rationality" (*KFSA* 2: 370: "frevelnde[m] Verstand"). It is necessary for its "truth and purity to remain inviolate."[18] But this preservation of truth is not just necessary for the work of art – it is the key to "man's [...] own inner happiness," as "the salvation of families and nations rest upon it" (*KFSA* 2: 268). Although the hyperbole of this statement suggests an ironic intent, I want to focus on the relationship between "truth" and "man's [...] own inner happiness" here in connection with sentiment in the Romantic period, the yearning for an experience of the

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anymore, as seems to be happening in this essay on incomprehensibility; if irony turns into a mannerism and becomes, as it were ironical about the author; if one has promised to be ironical for some useless book without first having checked one's supply and then having to produce it against one's will, like an actor full of aches and pains; and if irony runs wild and can't be controlled any longer."

[17] See Dane 115: "He is trapped in his (discussion of) irony; he is producing a discussion of irony for what will be only another superfluous paperback; his irony has turned on him."

[18] *KFSA* 2: 370: "wenn sie nur unverbrüchlich treu und rein bewahrt wird."

infinite sublime. As Cathy Comstock states in her essay "'Transcendental Buffoonery:' Irony as Process in Schlegel's 'Über die Unverständlichkeit,'"

> At the same time that it enforces this defensive distance between the real and the ideal, irony, in appropriately contradictory fashion, makes the experience of the absolute accessible through its own mirroring of the "infinite play" of the sublime. The experience of irony offered us in "Über die Unverständlichkeit" moves us closer to essential truth, in other words, by stepping back, by showing us, through its own unwillingness to be bound to certain meaning, that split between form and essence inherent to our temporal condition is not lamentable but valuable. (446)

It is through the experience of irony that the reader can approximate truth and achieve a nearness that, by still leaving the last point "in the dark," enables the experience of the absolute.[19]

These considerations on *Über die Unverständlichkeit* will complement another important characteristic of Schlegel's irony, seen in *Athenaeum* fragment 51, namely, the balance of self-creation and self-destruction:

> Naiv ist, was bis zur Ironie, oder bis zum steten Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung natürlich, individuell oder klassisch ist, oder scheint. Ist es bloß Instinkt, so ists kindlich, kindisch, oder albern; ists bloße Absicht, so entsteht Affektation.[20]

Here, irony is expressed as floating constantly between self-creation and self-destruction, with self-creation as the unrestrained artistic process, and self-destruction as its limiting countermovement: the ambivalence between the enthusiasm to want to include everything in the work of art and the "limiting, corrective skepticism" that results in not saying enough (Wiese 213). If the work of art is "simply instinctive, then it's childlike, childish, or silly; if it's merely

[19] *KFSA* 2: 370 (my emphasis): "Ja das Köstlichste was der Mensch hat, die innere Zufriedenheit selbst hängt, wie jeder leicht wissen kann, irgendwo zuletzt *an einem solchen Punkte, der im Dunkeln gelassen werden muß*, dafür aber auch das Ganze trägt und hält, und diese Kraft in demselben Augenblicke verlieren würde, wo man ihn in Verstand auflösen wollte."

[20] *KFSA* 2: 172: "Naïve is what is or seems to be natural, individual, or classical to the point of irony, or else to the point of continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self-destruction. If it's simply instinctive, then it's childlike, childish, or silly; if it's merely intentional, then it gives rise to affectation."

intentional, then it gives rise to affectation. The beautiful, poetical, ideal naive must combine intention and instinct." With this, Schlegel emphasizes that in order to overcome either of these shortcomings, there has to be a balance of deliberateness and enthusiastic inspiration.

Lyceum fragment 37 illuminates this dynamic of self-creation and self-destruction with a more explicit remark on the balance between the two forces:

> Um über einen Gegenstand gut schreiben zu können, muß man sich nicht mehr für ihn interessieren […]. So lange der Künstler erfindet und begeistert ist, befindet er sich […] in einem illiberalen Zustande. Er wird dann alles sagen wollen; welches eine falsche Tendenz junger Genies, oder ein richtiges Vorurteil alter Stümper ist. Dadurch verkennt er den Wert und die Würde der Selbstbeschränkung, die doch für den Künstler wie für den Menschen das Erste und das Letzte, das Notwendigste und das Höchste ist.[21]

In order to "write well" artists must have a two-fold relation to their work, being able to give way to their inner creative abundance and simultaneously restrain themselves. Central to this creative process is the concept of self-restriction ("Selbstbeschränkung"). As Strohschneider-Kohrs writes:

> Mit dem Wort 'Selbstbeschränkung', das im Zentrum des 37. Lyceums-Fragments steht, ist etwas Entscheidendes gesagt. Es meint die Freiheit des Menschen und Künstlers vor sich selbst oder vor zu starker oder falscher Bindung an den Gegenstand und den Aussagewillen; ein für die künstlerische Mitteilung wichtiges in sich gebundenes Vermögen der Selbstbestimmung. (28)

[21] *KFSA* 2: 151: "In order to write well about something, one shouldn't be interested in it any longer. [...] As long as the artist is in the process of discovery and inspiration, he is in a state which [...] is at the very least intolerant. He wants to blurt out everything, which is a fault of young geniuses or a legitimate prejudice of old bunglers. And so he fails to recognize the value and the dignity of self-restriction, which is after all, for the artist as well as the man, the first and the last, the most necessary and the highest duty. Most necessary because wherever one does not restrict oneself, one is restricted by the world; and that makes one a slave. The highest because one can only restrict oneself at those points and places where one possesses infinite power, self-creation, and self-destruction. Even a friendly conversation which cannot be broken off at any moment, completely arbitrarily, has something intolerant about it. But a writer who can and does talk himself out, who keeps nothing back for himself, and likes to tell everything he knows, is to be pitied."

It is in self-restriction that the pendulum can sustain the suspense between self-creation ("Selbstschöpfung") and self-destruction ("Selbstvernichtung"), which are thus imperatively connected. It is through their dialectic that the artist and the work of art can reach interplay and a reciprocating motion can be made between them.

Although *Lyceum* fragment 37 does not mention the term *irony* explicitly, Strohschneider-Kohrs convincingly outlines self-restriction as such, constituting for her the creative process in the dialectic of the two opposing forces.[22] Beyond this, we see an explicit reference to irony in Schlegel's *Athenaeum* fragment 51; the only fragment that mentions this dialectic of self-creation and self-destruction in direct context with irony. Given the context and the direct mention of the term "irony," it is therefore productive to read the two fragments jointly to gain a better understanding of the balance and act of "hovering" between these two creative forces, so central part of Schlegel's concept, as it is only in this equilibrium that irony can transpire. In *Athenaeum* fragment 51, Schlegel proposes the two opposite forces in the creative process of creating ironic works of art, forces that then come together in the moment of self-restriction seen in *Lyceum* fragment 37.

The two fragments also help to see the emphasis on the space between the two forces. It is here that I see another aspect of Schlegel's irony relevant for the present discussion of the irony found in Kleist's work. Not only is it disruptive, as I have shown in the above discussion of the moment of parabasis, but in it we also see a distinct stress on the space "in between." Through the constant back and forth between self-creation and self-destruction, the two opposite

[22] See Strohschneider-Kohrs, p. 31ff: "Im ersten Teil des 37. Lyceums-Fragments steht das Wort 'Selbstvernichtung' für diesen Sinn einer Bedingung für freie Selbstergreifung; es bezeichnet einen notwendigen Teilvorgang im dialektischen Prozeß, - untrennbar von dem zweiten mitbedingtem Vorgang: 'Selbstschöpfung', Das ist ein wichtiger Aufschluß über den Akt freier Selbsterhebung, den Schlegel für die Ironie aussagt. […] Bedeutet die Ironie in der Haltung des Künstlers die dialektisch sich begründende Selbstbeschränkung, so kann diese Haltung durchaus formal zu fassenden Eigentümlichkeiten der Dichtung ablesbar werden."

forces create the "frame" for the space that lies in between them, the space in which irony emerges. Both forces, however, must work equivalently and at the same time in order to hold their balance. *Athenaeum* fragment 121 says that

> Eine Idee ist ein bis zur Ironie vollendeter Begriff, eine absolute Synthesis absoluter Antithesen, der stete sich selbst erzeugende Wechsel zwei streitender Gedanken.[23]

Here again, we find irony described as a motion between two poles and, characterized as a "continual self-creating interchange," it can be imagined as a perpetual movement. What Schlegel describes as an "absolute synthesis" is not a fusion of the two antitheses, two opposing forces, into a new connected whole: instead, the opposites maintain their strength and thus the balance and space between them.

In another fragment that also directly refers to irony, *Lyceum* fragment 48, Schlegel writes:

> Ironie ist die Form des Paradoxen. (*KFSA* 2: 153)

The term paradox, from the Greek *paradoxon*, refers to something contradictory.[24] With this fragment, Schlegel emphasizes not only what we have already seen above (the maintaining of two opposite forces) but also implies that what is not a contradictory statement cannot be considered irony. The maintaining of conflicting poles lies at its core. Interestingly, the term "paradox" in this fragment hints at irony's root in rhetoric: "Diese Bestimmung deutet an, daß der Begriff der romantischen Ironie der rhetorischen Tradition entstammt, in der die Figur der Ironie eine Aussage bezeichnet, die das genaue Gegenteil von dem meint, was sie tatsächlich beinhaltet" (Kremer 93). While the paradox is rooted in rhetoric, Schlegel takes his concept of

[23] *KFSA* 2: 184: "An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts."
[24] See *DWB*, s. v. "Paradox"; and Liddell and Scott, s. v. "paradoxon."

irony far beyond that scope: for Schlegel, irony is one of the core principles of the aesthetic, creative process, a principle that in its essence is driven by the notions of contradiction and perpetual openness (Kremer 93).

But how does Schlegel's irony aid the interpretation of Kleist's plays? How does Kleist's irony relate to Schlegel's? To answer these questions, I want to draw on Bernd Fischer's article *Irony Ironized: Heinrich von Kleist's Narrative Stance and Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Irony*, one of the few texts to consider irony in Kleist's work, and one that offers a relevant and insightful contribution to the scholarship. According to Fischer, Wolfgang Wittkowski, in *"Die Heilige Cäcilie" und "Der Zweikampf": Kleists Legenden und die romantische Ironie*, was the first to recognize Kleist's relation to and use of Romantic irony. Wittkowski states that Kleist and Schlegel were acquainted with each other, referencing two letters in which Kleist asks Adolfine von Werdeck to give Schlegel his regards.[25] Furthermore, he states that Kleist admired Schlegel in much the same way he admired Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Following this, we can assume that Kleist was familiar with Schlegel's literary aesthetics, including his concept of irony.

Fischer takes up Wittkowski's "placement of Kleist within the tradition of romantic irony," but convincingly argues against Kleist's alliance with this tradition by recognizing that he "undermines in an ironic style the very school to which he owes this style" (64). Fischer reasons that it is Kleist's willingness "to negate the romantic teleology of a poetic anticipation of the infinite" that ultimately sets him apart from Romantic ironists: "Within Schlegel's theory even the negating power of irony is employed as a modus of progressive approximation […] to an infinite but all the more certain telos. […] Kleist confronts the idealistic construction of infinite

[25] See Fischer, p. 32. For the letters, see "Grüßen Sie Fr. Schlegel […]," Kleist's letter to Adolfine von Werdeck from July 28, 1801 (*BKA* 4.2: 81); and November 29, 1801 (*BKA* 4.2: 141).

meaning with the powerful force of a finite world" (62-63). And thus in Kleist's prose, Fischer writes, the "infinite play with the finite is inverted to a finite play with the infinite" (63). It is through constant confrontation with secular finitude that Kleist uses irony against itself and undermines its construct of a "utopian" approximation of infinity (67).

While Fischer's study is only concerned with prose works, his conclusions not only reinforce Kleist's overall connection to Schlegel but also evidence the ways in which Kleist utilizes irony as a form of criticism – "criticism from within," as Fischer puts it (69). By using irony to confront itself, Kleist explores its very disruptive force. I want to follow Fischer's argument concerning Kleist's use of the finite to breach notion of infinity associated with irony and argue, moreover, that we also see this notion of finitude in the particular focus on the broken body. It is an em-body-ment of finitude through its mortality and vulnerability. Although not every body treated in this study ends up lifeless, they all show a particular, literalized or materialized form of irony through their fragmentation and brokenness. As we will see in the next chapters, Kleist's distinctly physical irony is not limited to biological bodies but also includes non-organic bodies, like the body of the text or an object.

While Romantic irony plays a principal part in my analysis, it also provides the springboard for Paul de Man's take on irony about 150 years later in *The Concept of Irony*, the transcript of a lecture he gave in 1977 at Ohio State University.[26] Here, de Man discusses the possibility of even conceptualizing irony in the first place and considers Schlegel a principal source for thinking about a theory of irony, announcing him as "the main author" that he will

[26] See de Man, pp. 163-184. I have chosen this essay as de Man's most vital essay for the purpose of the study on Kleist's irony but, since not every detail of this piece is of significant relevance for this dissertation project, only key aspects will be selected and discussed.

"have to" be concerned with in his text.[27] For de Man, whose work in the tradition of deconstruction is particularly influential for rhetoric and the concept of tropes, irony is a central topic. As a figure of speech, a trope derives its effect from the relationship between signifier and signified. Irony as a trope, for example, can thus use a signifier, a word that carries the meaning contrary to what is meant. With this, it is at work in the interspace between the intended meaning and the actual meaning, hinting at a "gap" between the signifier and the signified.

De Man famously discusses the possibility of considering irony as the "trope of tropes" (165). Pointing out that the irony does just what is meant by "trope," from the Greek *tropos*, "turn," a "turning away," creating a "deviation between literal and figural."[28] De Man continues – "Irony seems to be the trope of tropes, the one that names the term as the "turning away"" – but quickly retreats, lest this "definition" stand on its own:

> [T]o say that irony [...] is the trope of tropes is to say something, but it is not anything that's equivalent to a definition. Because: what is a trope, and so on? We certainly don't know that. What is then the trope of tropes? We know that even less. Definitional language seems to be in trouble when irony is concerned. [...] In short, it is very difficult, impossible indeed, to get to a conceptualization by means of definition. (165)

This passage already arrives at one of the central points of de Man's essay, the impossibility of a "conceptualization [of irony] by means of definition" (165).

De Man's argument is as complex as it is rich but, as with my discussion of aspects of Schlegel's irony, I must limit myself to just those strands of de Man's text that relate to the present reading of Kleist.

In the beginning of the essay, de Man points out and challenges three categories to interpret Schlegel's irony that, as he says, essentially "defuse" and "reduce" it (169). The first is

[27] De Man 163. See also p. 167: "Friedrich Schlegel is the most important, where the problem [of "understanding" irony] gets worked out."
[28] De Man 164. See also Liddell and Scott, "tropos."

as "*Kunstmittel*," an "artistic effect" employed to "heighten or diversify the aesthetic appeal of a text" and create "a playful aesthetic distance" that would allow for the expression of things beyond the literal (de Man 169) – most simply, to say things between the lines. The second strategy under which de Man organizes considerations of irony is as a "dialectic of the self" (169). Here, he states, irony has been "reduc[ed] […] to a dialectic of the self as a reflexive structure" (169). In the context of "Eine Reflexion," a chapter from Schlegel's *Lucinde*, de Man argues that consciousness has a way to distance and reflect on itself and that these structures, within the self, can be described as an irony that is a dialectic of the self. Similarly, in the third way to "reduce" irony, its structures are discussed as a "dialectic of history" (170).

By then reading the two *Lyceum* fragments, 42 and 668, from Schlegel's *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, de Man constructs his position on irony, which "completes" Schlegel's irony by describing it as the "permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes" (179). What de Man is working out here is that the emphasis lies not on the notion of irony as simply interrupting but on its *constant* interruption, which relentlessly disconnects the narrative. This narrative is compounded by a structure that in itself is based on a tropological system (179). To fully lay out what this tropological system entails, de Man digresses to discuss the importance of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the details of whose philosophy are not subject of this study. All the same, I will briefly follow de Man's inquiry, as it furthers the understanding of his positioning of irony in the "system of tropes."

Discussing Fichte, de Man focuses on the dialectic of the self, coming from a linguistic perspective. The self in Fichte, de Man states, is "posited originally by language. Language posits radically and absolutely the self, the subject, as such" (172). For de Man, therefore, Fichte demonstrates the potential and readiness of language to name and posit (*setzen*). Language does

not just posit the self, however, but also its opposite, its negation, as any proposal of a self necessarily implies its opposite simply by the distinguishing force of identification. This is crucial; as it is through negation that definition itself becomes possible. That which is posited in itself cannot be defined: it is "a purely empty, positional act, and no acts of judgment can be made about it, no statements of judgment of any kind can be made about it" (de Man 173). But the self and its opposite can, by ways of points of contact, "define each other" (de Man 173). Once regarded in connection with its counterpart, it is no longer empty: "But because it posits its opposite, the plus and the minus can get to some extent in contact with each other and they do this by delimiting and defining each other: *Selbstbeschränkung*, *Selbstbestimmung—Selbstbeschränkung*" (de Man 173). It is only through distinction from the other that individual properties emerge and judgments can be made, enabling juxtaposition and comparisons between common and unique properties. Based on this dynamic, de Man presents Fichte's system of judgment, grounded on the comparison of properties, their differences and similarities. This judgment then consists of two different categories: synthetic judgment, in which there is an assumption of difference, and analytic judgment, which assumes similarity.[29]

It is through this system of judgments that de Man draws his connection to metaphor as a trope and the "epistemology of tropes" (174). He argues that this system of judgments, the judgment based on comparing differences and similarities, follows the "structure of the metaphor" and, thus, "the structure of tropes." Throughout his discussion of Fichte, de Man emphasizes that this entire system is based on language. The self – and, with it, its negation –

[29] See de Man 174: "Synthetic judgments are judgments in which you say that some thing is like another [...] every entity which is like another must be in like it in at least one property. [...] That's synthetic judgment, which thus postulates differences, assumes differences, when a similarity is being stated. [...] Or, if I make an analytic judgment, a negative judgment, if I say that A is not B, then it supposes a property X in which A and B are alike. [...] [I]n this system, every synthetic judgment always supposes an analytical judgment. If I say that something is like something, I have to imply a difference, and if I say that something differs from something, I have to imply a similarity."

must be posited through language and, given de Man's vision of the language at the base of Fichte's system, it is just a small step to follow the argument that the very circulation of properties that allows for the acts of judgment to be interpreted is resembling the structure of tropes:

> This very movement which is being described here is the circulation of properties, the circulation of tropes, within a system of knowledge. This is the epistemology of tropes. This system is structured like metaphors—like figures in general, metaphors in particular. [...] Now, this whole system, [...] is first of all a theory of trope, a theory of metaphor, because [...] the circulation of property (*Merkmal*) described in the judgment here is structures like a metaphor or trope, is based on the substitution of properties. It's structured like a synecdoche, a relationship between part and whole, or structured like a metaphor, a substitution on the basis of resemblance and of differentiation between two entities. The structure of the system is tropological. It is the tropological system in its most systematic and general form. (174-175)

While Strohschneider-Kohrs had described the dialectic of Schlegel's self-creation and self-destruction as an interplay reached between the artist and the artwork, de Man here sees these terms as the very core of the system of tropes. Strohschneider-Kohrs does recognize the connection to Fichte but prioritizes her focus on the creative process of the artist and its relation to the work of art (23ff). De Man aims his attention on the epistemology of the system of tropes: the "allegory of tropes" is the "narrative structure resulting from the tropological system, as it is being defined systematically by Fichte" and irony, as de Man "defines," is the "permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes" (179).

It is through this interruption, the permanent parabasis, de Man argues, that irony makes it "impossible to ever achieve a theory of narrative that would be consistent" (179). It is irony, after all, that interrupts and disrupts the system of tropes, leaving irony then both among and between tropes, a part of the tropological system while also a force that ruptures the very system

to which it belongs. It is working in between, suspending cohesive structure, and with this interruption of tropes comes the interruption of the narrative line:

> There is a machine there [...], which undoes any narrative consistency of lines, and which undoes the reflexive and the dialectical model, both of which are, as you know, the basis of any narration. There is no narration without reflection, no narrative without dialectic, and what irony disrupts [...] is precisely that dialectic and that reflexivity, the tropes. The reflexive and the dialectical are the tropological system [...], and that is what irony undoes. (181)

His text proposes a reading of irony that interrupts itself, that cannot be "contained" by theory, and, with the interpretation of irony as "permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes," de Man's theorization specifies and expands Schlegel's Romantic irony as, in a way, operating at the very core of rhetoric. The tropological system that is drawn and in which irony is involved shows, once more, a picture of the almost proliferating web of irony expanding from philosophy to the self-awareness of the artist, to the artist's relationship to the work of art, to irony as an aesthetic, and to irony as a trope.

Both Schlegel and de Man have demonstrated the impossibility of irony to be contained – whether through conceptualization, definition or theory – proving that irony is "charged" with a fundamental negativity that prevents enclosure. As Dane pronounces in his *Critical Mythology of Irony*:

> There is no correct understanding of the word irony, no historically valid reading of irony. (191)

This part of the chapter has focused on aspects of two major perspectives on irony; an irony that can be found in the permanent interruption of parabasis, functioning at the in-between of the artist's self-restriction and approximation of truth, and the irony that is part of the very system of tropes it disrupts. This position is where this dissertation will pursue irony and explore its disruptive power, drawing on the notion of irony as a force that is both creating and working

within a gap, an in-between. Kleist utilizes these forces and aestheticizes them not only literarily but also in the physicality of bodies. The following chapters explore how he creates an irony that breaks through the boundaries of the text and materializes in the bodies of his plays, particularly evident in the decidedly physical form of irony in *Der zerbrochne Krug*, discussed in chapter three. In considerations of all the plays, however, irony's force of disruption and its characteristic of belonging and breaking will be central topics.

The Comic Effect

"Dès que le souci du corps intervient, une infiltration comique est à craindre."[30]

To analyze elements in Kleist's plays that relate to physical comic effects, I would like to go back through history of European theater and begin by looking at the tradition of expressions through the body – more precisely, expressions creating a comic effect through the body. Already in the dramatic farce of the Middle Ages are found stereotypical figures that represent deviations from the norm, creating comic situations (Dietl 12ff). This deviation is a crucial aspect in theories of the comic body: whether it is a difference in social or political realm or in bodily appearances, the otherness – as is also seen in representations of the "Narr" or "Hanswurst" archetypes – is the principal idea in these humoristic pieces.[31]

[30] See Bergson, p. 42.

[31] Ralf Haekel describes the character of the "Narr" (fool), who has roots in the early Middle Ages, as someone who is missing "every moralizing element" (102) The character of "Hanswurst," although already known "in the German language before he appeared as part of the traveling theater" (Haekel 100), is mostly famous for his appearance on stage as the coarse fool in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

An even greater influence on the development of European theater was the *commedia dell'arte*, emerging in Italy in the early sixteenth century. Unlike occasional local productions, which were usually staged for special events, the *commedia dell'arte* performed on a more regular basis and introduced the profession of the actor. Their theater did not remain in Italy but traveled to several European countries (mainly to Spain, France and Germany), carrying its theatrical tradition across the borders. The actors never memorized and reenacted fully developed plots but acted impromptu within a given framework or situation:

> Schlagfertigkeit, Witz und andere Komik erzeugende Redetechniken [konnten] auswenig gelernt, wiederholt und variiert werden […] überdies […] [stand] ein spielbereites Reservoir an Szenen- und Situationsmodellen zur Verfügung. (Haekel 95)

The characters of the *commedia dell'arte* were reoccurring types that the actors would adopt and perfect – some, like Harlequin or Columbina, are still recognized to this day – and these *types* arguably formed the most characteristic aspect of the tradition. The types were conjured with masks that covered about half of each actor's face, which, as one can imagine, drastically minimized their ability to communicate through facial expressions. Although speech was used during their performances, bodily gestures thus became increasingly important on stage. The *commedia* consequently emphasized whole-body movements and gestures, allowing audiences from countries or regions that speak different languages to follow their plot.

The French director, actor, and mime Jean-Louis Barrault uses a convincing metaphor when talking about masks in theatre, writing that the mask is "serving the entire body as springboard of a variety of expressions."[32] While Barrault here is referring to the performance of *Orestie*, his remark applies to the whole of this discussion of bodily comedy: not a mere static

[32] See Barrault, p. 262: "Weit davon entfernt, die Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten einzuschränken, läßt sie und vielmehr unbekannte Instinkte entdecken und dient dem gesamten Körper als Sprungbrett vielfältiger Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten." See also Dietl, p. 96.

cover, the mask is instead a tool that emphasizes and highlights the body as a whole, putting it in the focus of the performance. If we follow this focus on the body, what can we conclude about the relation of performance and semiotics? If language is not what is primarily used to communicate, then what does this imply for bodies onstage and their ability to convey meaning? In the extensive dramatic theory proposed in her book *Semiotik des Theaters*, Erika Fischer-Lichte develops a theory of theater as a semiotic system, in which she points out that the "meaning" of the play only develops in its performance.[33] For her, it is only through the reciprocal effects that the actors and audience have on each other that any meaning from the play can emerge.[34] This relationship implies a differentiation between the semiotics of the scripts and the meaning, which emerges through the enactment and engagement of people on stage and spectators.

While Fischer-Lichte's study focuses on scripted performances and ultimately builds her argument around linguistic signs and their ability to convey meaning in a theatrical setting, she includes both verbal and non-verbal aspects of theater, thereby inviting the application of her thoughts to the sixteenth-century Italian theatrical tradition, with its very limited preset or scripted guidelines, language potentially beyond the grasp of its audience but considerably increased bodily expressions. Fischer-Lichte's insights thus open the question of semiotic bodies in the *commedia dell'arte*: through its focus on the body rather than on recited texts and instructions, the step of "translating" or transforming a script into an expression or sound is

[33] See Fischer-Lichte, pp. 8ff. The term "meaning" (Bedeutung) here is referring to semiotics.
[34] See Fischer-Lichte, p. 8: "Theather, verstanden als ein kulturelles System unter anderen, hat also generell die Funktion, Bedeutung zu erzeugen."

reduced to the mere impromptu performance of the actors in a system that could then be understood as a semiosis of their bodies or, their body language.[35]

Hans-Christian Stillmark's discussion *Zu Kleists theatralischer Transformation der Körper* is helpful here. He takes up and extends Fischer-Lichte's theory by analyzing the specific receptive processes active during theatrical enactments and he suggests including the body as a sign (*Zeichen*) in the performative function:

> Indem auf den wechselseitigen Konstitutionsprozess [von Akteur und Zuschauer] von Semiosen hingewiesen wird, erschließt sich nur zum Teil das Besondere des Performativen. Ich plädiere an dieser Stelle dafür, die Arbeit der Aufnahme des Performativen auf die Seite des Zeichens zu beziehen, in der das Zeichen selbst materiell konstituiert und somit in seinem »Körper« formiert ist. Unter dem hier metaphorisch benannten »Körper« sind die unterschiedlich medialen und materiell bestimmten Träger des Zeichens zu verstehen, die bei theatralischen Ereignissen bspw. von einem Lautkörper im Falle eines sprachlichen Zeichens bis zur individuellen Gestalt des maskierten und kostümierten Schauspielers mit seiner besonderen körperlichen Beschaffenheit und Ausstrahlung reicht. (215)

Connecting performatives to the "body" (of the actor or the linguistic sign) is a productive thought for this study on the body and irony in Kleist, for not only does this connection show the correlation between the physical body and the body of the (dramatic) text but it also allows for a countermotion of physical and textual representation. In simpler terms, the body on stage is not relying on speech and, indeed, has the ability to outperform it.

As was mentioned in my introduction, the body in both Kleist's plays and prose – particularly its deformations, mutilations or the other violent treatments it undergoes – has been subject to numerous studies.[36] But despite the research on bodies in Kleist's work, questions

[35] Fischer-Lichte briefly mentions the *commedia dell'arte* in connection with the use and function of costumes: "Die Kleidung weist also auf die jeweilige soziale Rolle hin, die ihrem Träger zukommt…weder die Figuren der commedia dell'arte noch die Helden der griechischen Tragödie wechselten ihre Kostüme. Ihr jeweiliges Kostüm, das sie im gesamten Verlauf der Aufführung trugen, war Ausweis und Beglaubigung der Identität ihrer Rolle." (122)
[36] See for example Gönner; and Stephens.

connecting the body to the comic or irony have been rarely discussed, if at all.[37] Before taking a closer look at selected plays in which we can see this connection well at work, I would first like to step back to discuss a few different approaches to the concept of the comic. The word *Komödie* entered the German language as *Comedien* in the late fifteenth century, the term *komisch* (or *comisch*) established just before the turn of the century.[38] The entry for the term *komisch* in *Grimms Wörterbuch* mentions the connotation of strange or odd ("wunderlich") and low or rough ("niedrig, grob, derb komisch"), pointing out the connection of amusement and anomaly as well as the low, a link that will reappear throughout this study.[39] The variety of definitions and conceptualizations of the comic is long and extensive and it is not the intention of this study to create a general theory of the comic but, instead, to interpret and situate comic elements in Kleist's text in relation to some existing theories. Therefore, I will outline – in broad strokes – selected theories from literary history that will be helpful for this discussion, primarily focused on concepts of the comic in the aesthetic, literary field.

Despite the late emergence of the term *komisch* in the German language, theories of a comic effect date back to Plato. As Michael Mader states in *Das Problem des Lachens und der Komödie bei Platon*, its earliest known definition can be found in Plato's *Philebus* (composed

[37] While not examining the body in particular, Michael Moering looks at the humorous and ironic sides of Kleist's prose in his study "Witz und Ironie in der Prosa Heinrich von Kleists." Other texts discussing comic effects in relation to the body focus on specific works, for example, Kleist's comedy *Der zerbrochne Krug.* David Wellbery, for example, links Adam's crudeness and "körperliche Turbulenz" to the image of "Hanswurst" ("*Der zerbrochne Krug*" 22). He argues that the use of phallic food especially indicates Kleist "bringing Hanswurst back on stage" (Wellbery, "*Der zerbrochne Krug*" 23) Most recently, Joel B. Lande published his reading of Adam in *Persistence of Folly*, where he compares the judge to the "fool" on stage (237-318).

[38] Maurer and Rupp, *Deutsche Wortgeschichte*, 1: 456: "Albrecht von Eyb führt […] *Komödie* (in der Lautform pl. *Comedien*) ins Deutsche ein (1472). […] Als zu *Komödie* gehöroges Adjektiv wird *komisch* seit […] 1499 in der Verbindung *der comisch poet* geläufig; zur Bedeutung "witzig, lächerlich, närrisch, possenhaft" gelandt es erst im 18. Jhdt."

[39] *DWB*, s. v. "komisch": "(*nach frz.* comique), […] *scheint erst spät im* 18. *jh. aufgekommen,* […] *während* komödie *als* comedi (2, 630) *schon im* 16. *jh. besteht* […] *auch* niedrig, grob, derb komisch."

after 360 BCE).[40] Here, the comic manifests as the ridicule of one's misjudgment of oneself. In the dialogue with Protarchus, Socrates explains the triad of ridicule as overassessment of wealth, beauty, and competence. In this context, he points out the motivation of the comic as contrary to the inscription "know thyself," found at Delphi:

> [Socrates.] The ridiculous is in its main aspect a kind of vice which gives its name to a condition; and it is that part of vice in general which involves the opposite of the condition mentioned in the inscription at Delphi.
> [Protarchus.] You mean "Know thyself," Socrates?
> [Socrates.] Yes; and the opposite of that, in the language of the inscription, would evidently be not to know oneself at all. […]
> [Socrates.] […] [O]n that principle; those of them who have this false conceit and are weak and unable to revenge themselves when they are laughed at you may truly call ridiculous, but those who are strong and able to revenge themselves you will define most correctly to yourself by calling them powerful, terrible, and hateful, for ignorance in the powerful is hateful and infamous—since whether real or feigned it injures their neighbours—but ignorance in the weak appears to us as naturally ridiculous. (Plato 333ff)

Judged against the imperative to "know thyself," a misjudgment of the self, presents an incongruity that results in a ridiculous comic effect.

In his *Poetics* from around 350 BCE, Aristotle also discusses comicality and emphasizes the harmlessness of this kind of humor. The subject's flaw can cause no harm or ruin:

> Comedy, as we said, is mimesis of baser but not wholly vicious characters: rather, the laughable is one category of the shameful. For the laughable comprises any fault or mark of shame which involves no pain or destruction: most obviously, the laughable mask is something ugly and twisted, but not painfully. (LCL 199, 45)

The term "Häßlichkeit" ("ugliness"), as Manfred Fuhrman points out in the annotations to his translation of the *Poetics* (108), refers not only to a mere physical unsightly appearance but also to any perceived unsoundness. András Horn convincingly emphasizes this sensual perceptibility

[40] See Mader, p. 9: "das früheste erhaltene Beispiel einer Theorie des Komischen."

of the imperfection as an essential factor of the comic, an aspect highly significant to theatrical enactments that are being perceived by an audience (41).

Several centuries later, in 1808, August Wilhelm Schlegel held his famous lectures on dramatic art and literature. Here, the discussion on comicality receives yet another turn, as Schlegel links the comic effect to the "animalistic side" of the human being. With his theory, he not only further specifies the subject matter of the comic, but also creates a "hierarchy" within its concept by introducing both "lower needs" and "higher demands" as factors:

> Wenn wir darauf achten, was noch jetzt auf unserer komischen Bühne die unfehlbare Wirkung des Lächerlichen macht, und sich nie abnutzen kann, so sind es eben solche unbezwingliche Regungen der Sinnlichkeit im Widerspruch mit höheren Forderungen. (Schlegel 4.1: 112)

The "higher demands" ("höhere Forderungen") refer to those made by the faculty of reason and understanding, to which the lower senses, the animalistic instincts, are contradistinctive. Interestingly, this form of the comic is linked to a loss of freedom in the activity of the animalistic drives. Reason, allowing for the subject to autonomously decide and judge, relates to freedom, which is extensively discussed by Schlegel. In his concept of the comic, however, this freedom is "enslaved" by the lower instincts:

> eben so wenig besteht [das komische Ideal] in einer die Wirklichkeit übersteigenden Anhäufung von sittlichen Gebrechen und Ausartungen; sondern in der Abhängigkeit von dem thierischen Theile, dem Mangel an Freyheit und Selbstständigkeit, dem Unzusammenhang und den Widersprüchen des inneren Daseyns, woraus alle Thorheit und Narrheit hervorgeht. […] Das scherzhafte Ideal besteht […] in der vollkommenen Harmonie und Eintracht der höheren Natur mit der thierischen, als des herrschenden Prinzips. Vernunft und Verstand werden als freywillige Sklavinnen der Sinne vorgestellt. (Schlegel 4.1: 111ff)

The term "freiwillig" here can be read as the voluntary stepping down of reason to let the animalistic drive take its place or, alternately, as an emphasis on free will and the choice to be enslaved by the sole hegemony of the lower drives. To put it more precisely, the turn towards

lower sensuality is connected to a conscious decision to turn over the power of reason, an aspect I will discuss in my first chapter in reference to passages from Kleist's *Käthchen*.

Schlegel also refers to the comic effect on stage as a culmination of confusion, misunderstandings and unsuccessful attempts to thrive, all of which, in the end, dissolve into nothingness:

> Und sie [die neue Komödie] ist um so komischer, je mehr […] Missverständnisse, Irrungen, vergebliche Bestrebungen, lächerliche Leidenschaft, und je mehr sich am Ende alles in Nichts auflöset. (4.1: 133)

The dissolution in nothingness is a key aspect in another conceptualization of a comic effect: Immanuel Kant's thoughts on laughter in paragraph 54 of his *Critique of Judgment*. For Kant, this expression of enjoyment is an affect caused by the sudden transformation of tension into nothingness:

> Das Lachen ist ein Affekt aus der plötzlichen Verwandlung einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts. (229)

The suddenness and accrued tension discussed in Kant's theory deserve emphasis. Also described as a moment of "Anspannung und Abspannung" that causes our mind to swing, the buildup and release of tension within an instant are crucial for the comic effect, as this sudden release is what results in the physical reaction of laughter (Kant 230).

Arthur Schopenhauer will later dismiss this theory along with Jean Paul's thoughts on the comic:

> Kants und Jean Pauls Theorien des Lächerlichen sind bekannt. Ihre Unrichtigkeit nachzuweisen halte ich für überflüssig; da Jeder, welcher gegebene Fälle des Lächerlichen auf sie zurückzuführen versucht, bei den allermeisten die Ueberzeugung von ihrer Unzulänglichkeit sofort erhalten wird. (92)

Schopenhauer nonetheless does include suddenness in his thoughts on the comic effect of the ridiculous:

> der Ursprung des Lächerlichen [ist] die paradoxe und daher unerwartete Subsumtion eines Gegenstandes unter einen ihm übrigens heterogenen Begriff, und bezeichnet demgemäß das Phänomen des Lachens allemal die plötzliche Wahrnehmung einer Inkongruenz zwischen einem solchen Begriff und dem durch denselben gedachten realen Gegenstand, also zwischen dem Abstrakten und dem Anschaulichen. (92)

While this passage focuses on the incongruity between the perceived object and its underlying concept, the recognition of discrepancy happens in a sudden moment ("plötzliche Wahrnehmung").

Schopenhauer's relevance to this discussion not only lies in his relationship to Kant's thoughts on the role of comic and laughter in emphasizing suddenness, but also highlights the distinct significance of incongruity that will be picked up throughout this dissertation in the close readings of Kleist's plays.

Before taking a closer look at the dramas, I would simply like to stress the moment of deviation that we can observe in these concepts of comicality. In all above-mentioned theories – Plato's misjudgment of the self, Aristotle's harmless flaw of the character, A. W. Schlegel's reign of animalistic drives, or Schopenhauer and Kant's incongruity between concept and object – there is always deviation at play. The subject who acts according to animalistic drives can only be perceived as comical through a deviation from the accepted norms of conduct. The same can be said about the harmless flaw, which can only be recognized as such through its anomaly. Only in the moment of overstepping norms does the deviation become apparent. Once these boundaries are crossed, the outlines of the norm itself consequently become noticeable. In the following chapters, this deviation will be one of the chief focal points as I explore the ways in which Kleist's plays draw on this particular incongruity and create a comic effect through representations and performances of the body.

2 *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*: A Body Breaking the Rules

Das Käthchen von Heilbronn by Henrich von Kleist is the first play I would like to read against the backdrop of the interplay between the body and the comic. My study will focus on Käthchen herself, the descriptions of her character, movements, and bodily gestures, arguing that it is particularly through the example of Käthchen that we can see Kleist develop a complex form of physical comedy that he articulates and demonstrates through literary and theatrical means. The sophisticated sequence of movements and breaks of the protagonist's body exemplify Kleist's own ruptures from the social and dramaturgical frameworks of his time, in particular those regarding the benevolence and stability of patriarchal relations and their unproblematic perpetuation in culture.

Das Käthchen von Heilbronn oder die Feuerprobe ein großes historisches Ritterschauspiel premiered in Vienna in March 1810. It opens with Käthchen's father Theobald, a blacksmith, accusing Graf Friedrich Wetter vom Strahl of having bewitched his daughter when he passed through their town. How else could he explain her uncharacteristic behavior after having met the young man in armor, even throwing herself out a window to follow him? Meanwhile, due to a dream he had, Strahl believes that Kunigunde von Thurneck, who is actually engaged to Rheingraf vom Stein, is destined to be his wife and persues her, while she is only interested in profiting through a union with him. Through a series of dramatic events, which include Kunigunde's former fiancée torching Strahl's castle and Käthchen nearly dying in the flames but for the angel ("Cherub") who comes to save her, Strahl finds out that Käthchen is, in fact, the Emperor's daughter, making her eligible to be his bride.

Although scholars Erika Fischer-Lichte and Alexander Stillmark, introduced in chapter one, do refer to dramatic texts and their enactment on stage when they discuss the role of the body, body language and bodily performance in theater, I want to stress that Kleist's texts do not always draw a clear line between dramatic and narrative, between what is visible on stage and what is experienced through the text. Research has often noted that his narrative texts espouse a "theatrical narrative style."[41] There is surely an immediacy to his narrative texts, especially his novellas, but, as this chapter and my study as a whole will demonstrate, Kleist's monologues and the narrative passages of his dramatic texts also bring the spectacle of the narrative before the (inner) eye of the reader.[42] More simply, Kleist – whether through the use of particularly vivid descriptive language, particles that suggest immediacy, or technical theatrical terms – devises a complex strategy to create what Ulrike Landfester calls a "narrative stage" (147: "eine Bühne des Erzählens"), a space that readers and theatregoers can experience through their imagination. Such a construction can be exemplified by an excerpt from the novella *Das Erdbeben von Chili*, in which we witness Jeronimo, one of the protagonists, in turn witness the earthquake hit the city of St. Jago:

> *Hier stürzte* noch ein Haus zusammen, und jagte ihn […] in die Nebenstraße; *hier leckte* die Flamme schon […]; *hier wältzte* sich, aus seinem Gestade gehoben, der Mapochofluss auf ihn heran […]. *Hier lag* ein Haufen Erschlagener, *hier ächtzte* noch eine Stimme unter dem Schutte, *hier schrien* Leute von brennenden Dächern herab […]; *hier stand* ein anderer, bleich wie der Tod, und streckte sprachlos zitternde Hände zum Himmel. (*SW* 2: 146, my emphasis)

As reflected by the Greek root of the term deixis – *deíknūmi* (*δείκνῡμι*), to show or point out (Liddell and Scott, s. v. "deíknūmi") – the accumulation of the deictic particle "hier" does

[41] See for example p. 67 of Jochen Schmidt's reading of *Die Marquise von O…* See also Michael Ott's text on Kleist's "Schrifttheater," especially p. 35ff.

[42] In this context, Ott analyzes parts of *Das Bettelweib von Locano* to discuss Kleist's narrative style: "Somit ist der mit dem Anfangssatz eröffnete Imaginationsraum des "Schloßes" tatsächlich ein *sprachlicher Anschauungsraum* und in diesem Sinn wirklich eine "Bühne." […] Gleichzeitig bleiben [Kleists Prosatexte] selbst als Akre der In-Szene-Setzung transparent, als kenntliche Verwandlung von Wahrnehmungs- in Imaginationsräume, und als Inszenierung von Korporalität und mündlicher Präsenz der Schrift" (41 and 52).

exactly this, *showing* the events and bringing the scene to the readers eyes, as if they themselves were spectators of the earthquake taking place in Kleist's St. Jago.

As the following chapters demonstrate, this narrative style will also inform my reading of the body in the selected plays, focusing not only on the body present in its materiality on stage but also on the body in its "narrated form," within the text itself. In *Käthchen* in particular are several narrative passages in which a body is described, passages this study will analyze primarily in terms of the comic effect that Käthchen's body relays through her movement and gesture. But several other bodies also stand out, promising interesting conclusions. Kunigunde's, for example, is another comical body realized through explicit description:

> Freiburg: […] Sie ist eine mosaische Arbeit, aus allen drei Reichen der Natur zusammengesetzt. Ihre Zähne gehören einem Mädchen aus München, ihre Haare sind aus Frankreich verschrieben, ihrer Wangen Gesundheit kommt aus den Bergwerken in Ungarn, und den Wuchs, den ihr an ihr bewundert, hat sie einem Hemde zu danken, das ihr der Schmied, aus schwedischem Eisen, verfertigt hat. (*KVH* 5.3, lines 2446ff)

Her body consists of different entities synthetically formed into a unity. Yet with the individual components from different parts of the world still distinguishable, this body seems at once fragmented and whole. Nor is the focus on physicality in *Käthchen* limited to female bodies. A similar link between the chest and the armor is emphasized when Strahl is looking to get the repair work done by Theobald. The description of both the damage to his armor as well as the repair work needed suggests that the metal plates are closely connected to – if not a part of – his body:

> Theobald. […] Die Lust [den Pfalzgrafen] zu treffen, sprengt mir die Schienen; nimm Eisen und Draht, ohne daß ich mich zu entkleiden brauche, und heft sie mit wieder zusammen (*KVH* 1.1, lines 144ff);
>
> und gehe mit Pfriemen und Nadeln, an mein Geschäft. Darauf sag ich: Wohlauf Herr Ritter! Nun mögt ihr den Pfalzgrafen treffen; die Schiene ist eingerenkt, das Herz wird sie euch nicht mehr zersprengen. (lines 173ff)

When Käthchen is introduced in the beginning of the play, her body has not yet visibly appeared on stage but is only described by her father in a lengthy monologue that features this close connection between the narrative and the dramatic. In his account of Käthchen's supposed bewitching, Theobald repeatedly speaks in different "roles," creating a play-within-a-play by impersonating other characters.[43] While the last section of this chapter will detail the complexity of "stages" created within the text and their transgression of the lines of theatrical representation, I would like to stress here that already in Käthchen's verbal introduction is the relationship between body and text both emphasized and intensified. Her body is described (*be-schrieben*) and it is through the words of her father that she is "created" and brought to the inner eye of the audience:

> Theobald. […] *mein Käthchen* […] gesund an Leib und Seele, wie die ersten Menschen, die geboren sein mögen; ein Kind recht nach der Lust Gottes, das heraufging aus der Wüsten, am stillen Feierabend meines Lebens, wie ein gerader Rauch von Myrrhen und Wachholdern! Ein Wesen von zarterer, frommerer und lieberer Art müsst ihr euch nicht denken, und kämt ihr, auf Flügeln der Einbildung, zu den lieben kleinen Engeln, die, mit hellen Augen, aus den Wolken, unter Gottes Händen und Füßen hervorgucken. Ging sie in ihrem bürgerlichen Schmuck über die Straße, den Strohhut auf, von gelbem Lack glänzend, das schwarzsamtene Leibchen, das ihre Brust umschloss, mit feinen Silberkättlein behängt: so lief es flüsternd von allen Fenstern herab: das ist *das Käthchen* von Heilbronn, ihr Herren, als ob der Himmel von Schwaben sie erzeugt und von seinem Kuss geschwängert, die Stadt, die unter ihm liegt, sie geboren hätte. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 63ff, my emphasis)

Here, Theobald does not refer to the young girl as his *daughter* but instead as "mein Käthchen" and "das Käthchen," indicating the ownership of an object rather than a father-daughter relationship and ironically foreshadowing, through the use of the possessive adjective, claims

[43] See, for example, *KVH* 1.1, lines 16ff, 77ff, 102ff and 142ff.

concerning his paternity later in the play.[44] The belittling diminutive turns the grammatical gender of her given name, which is feminine (*die Katharina*), into the "neuter" *das* Käthchen; a neutralization already announced in the title.

As she is introduced as an object, it may thus not even come as a surprise that "das Käthchen von Heilbronn" is not characterized as having been naturally conceived, made of flesh and blood, but instead as some kind of supernatural being.[45] She is both heavenly and earthly, "fathered by the heaven of Swabia" but "born by the city beneath," related to the "angels above" yet walking the streets in civil garments. With this, Theoabld is idealizing Käthchen excessively, raising her up by describing her as a heavenly creature, which makes her fall later in the play even deeper. His notion of an idealistic figure is further emphasized by the indication of pure innocence in the mention of the "first people."[46] This reference to the Garden of Eden can also be found in Kleist's text *Über das Marionettentheater*, published in the same year as *Das Käthchen*.

Although a short summary cannot do justice to this complex text – a fictional dialogue between a first-person narrator and the character Herr C. who discuss the possibility of natural grace and a total harmony between body and mind – a few specific aspects can nonetheless be laid out. Herr C. reasons that, though their bodies are artificial, marionettes are superior – and more "natural" – dancers than humans. One of their advantages is their lack of affectation, owed to the fact that their soul rests in the center of gravity of their body, while, for human dancers, the soul can shift and wander into different parts of the body, causing their limbs to disregard the law of gravity:

[44] Throughout the text, Theobald refers to Käthchen as his daughter only twice: during Strahl's interrogation (*KVH* 1.2, line 531) and when he intends to bring his daughter back to the convent (3.3, line 1599). The lines are identical in each reference: "Komm, meine Tochter."
[45] Her coming into being could also be read as ironically referencing her illegitimate birth and Theobald's account as a precognition of his non-biological fatherhood.
[46] *KVH* 1.1, lines 65ff: "gesund an Leib und Seele, wie die ersten Menschen, die geboren worden sein mögen."

> Der Vorteil? […] daß sie sich niemals *zierte.* – Denn Ziererei erscheint, […] wenn sich die Seele […] in irgendeinem anderen Punkte befindet, als in dem Schwerpunkt der Bewegung. […] alle übrigen Glieder [sind], was sie sein sollen, tot, reine Pendel, und folgen dem Gesetz der Schwere; eine vortreffliche Eigenschaft, die man vergebens bei dem größten Teil unsrer Tänzer sucht. […] Sehen sie nur die P … an, […] die Seele sitzt ihr in den Wirbeln des Kreuzes […]. Sehen Sie den jungen F … an, […] die Seele sitzt ihm gar […] im Ellenbogen. (*SW* 2: 341ff)

These "mistakes," as Herr C. calls them, are "inevitable since we ate from the tree of knowledge" (*SW* 2: 342). The two characters discuss that it is consciousness that hinders the human body from moving with "natural grace" and wonder whether there is a possibility to gain – or regain – the state of natural balance:

> Doch das Paradies ist verriegelt und der Cherub hinter uns; wir müssen die Reise um die Welt machen, und sehen, ob es vielleicht von hinten irgendwo wieder offen ist.[47]

In Kleist's essay, the possibility of the body to move gracefully is closely linked to a return to Eden, a concept to which they recur to discuss the more relevant question of grace. Lucia Ruprecht puts it very clearly: "a second bite from the apple of knowledge that is summoned to bring back grace is, thus, to be understood as superior knowledge, and superior control, of the body" (40).

With this, Kleist chimes in on an ongoing discussion of the aesthetics of the body and the concept of grace in the so-called long eighteenth century. As this chapter will evidence, he critiques this concept by creating his own take on the comic through theatrical and literary means. In 1793, Friedrich von Schiller, the dominant thinker and contributor to the discourse on grace at the time, published the treatise *Über Anmut und Würde*, in which he develops a definition of grace based on the ancient concept of the "beauty of movement" (71: "Schönheit der Bewegung"). For Schiller, grace differs from beauty in that it refers not only to physical traits

[47] See *SW* 2: 343, which also continues: "Welche Unordnungen, in der natürlichen Grazie des Menschen, das Bewußtsein anrichtet."

endowed by nature. With the soul as its moving principle, furthermore, grace is not static but can appear and disappear (Schiller 73ff: "Wo […] Anmut stattfindet, da ist die Seele das bewegende Prinzip"). If such movement is solely driven by nature, however, it cannot be called grace (Schiller 85: "Bewegungen [am Menschen], die bloß der Natur angehören, können nie diesen Namen verdienen").

For Schiller, to speak of grace implies a moral sentiment. Grace, however, cannot be produced in a conscious, intentional act:

> Wenn also die Anmut eine Eigenschaft ist, die wir von willkürlichen Bewegungen fordern, und wenn auf der anderen Seite von der Anmut selbst doch alles Willkürliche verbannt sein muß, so werden wir sie in demjenigen, was bei absichtlichen Bewegungen unabsichtlich, zugleich aber einer moralischen Ursache im Gemüt entsprechend ist, aufzusuchen haben. (92)

While based on an intentional moral principle, grace itself thus appears only in unintentional movements and in a seamless mobile combination with natural beauty:

> Wenn sich der Geist in der von ihm abhängenden sinnlichen Natur auf eine solche Art äußert, daß sie seinen Willen aufs treueste ausrichtet und seine Empfindungen auf das sprechendste ausdrückt, ohne doch gegen die Anforderungen zu verstoßen, welche der Sinn an sie, als an Erscheinungen, macht, so wird dasjenige entstehen, was man Anmut nennt. (Schiller 101)

The "spoken expression" ("auf das sprechendste ausdrückt") refers to the accompanying physical phenomenon, which gives an indication of the moral constitution and sensibility of the graceful subject. For just a few pages prior, Schiller had written:

> Sprechend im engern Sinn ist nur die menschliche Bildung, und diese auch nur in denjenigen ihrer Erscheinungen, die seinen moralischen Empfindungszustand begleiten und demselben zum Ausdruck dienen. (93)

Here, Schiller bases his definition of grace on a concept in which reason and natural sensuality act in effortless, mutual unanimity.

In his essay on *Über das Marionettentheater*, Günter Blamberger argues that Kleist designed a different concept of grace that was "not based on a bourgeois-idealistic framework"

but was instead one that emulated the "old aristocratic model."[48] This differentiation emphasizes a shift away from a moral or natural authenticity and towards reputation and favor in the eyes of others.[49] While grace is the focus of Kleist's *Marionettentheater*, it also figures prominently in *Käthchen*, where it is particularly emphasized through the interplay of the body and the comic. One could even argue that Käthchen's leap from the window can be read as a "fall from grace." I agree with Blamberger that Kleist's understanding of grace differs from the aesthetic and moralistic-idealistic approach found in Schiller. I argue further that Kleist aestheticizes his differentiation from this approach by creating a particular comic effect, which, as I show in this chapter, is reflected poetically through a complex, exponentialized dramatic form.

While it has already been remarked that in Theobald's initial introduction of Käthchen, she is only described by her father and does not appear on stage physically – and will not until the opening of the second scene, when she is brought before the court – it is worth noting here that his presentation reflects his perception of his daughter, a perception characterized by specific bourgeois-moralistic values, recalling the female gracefulness we find in Schiller:

> Theobald. […] ein Kind recht nach der Lust Gottes […] ein Wesen von zarterer, frommerer und lieberer Art müsst ihr euch nicht denken. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 66ff)

Although the adjective "zart" ("delicate") can also be read in reference to her physical appearance, what is primarily emphasized here is not her physical beauty but her nature or type ("Art").[50] The attributes "fromm" and "lieb" ("devout" and "loving") describe her as embodying religious and social values and ethics and adhering to moral codes. Her devotion to morality is further increased by her influence on others:

[48] See Blamberger, "Agonalität," pp. 33ff: "Kleists Grazie-Begriff entstammt […] keinem zeitgenössischen, bürgerlich-idealistischen Konzept ästhetischer Erziehung, sondern dem alten aristokratischen, wie man es schon bei Castiglione kennt. Grazie meint schon bei Castiglione nichts anderes als die Kunst, einen guten Eindruck von sich zu geben."
[49] See also Blamberger, "Ars," pp. 74ff.
[50] See *DWB*, s. v. "zart": "Zart […] 2) schön, fein, anmuthig."

> Theobald. […] wer […] einen Gruß im Vorübergehen von ihr empfangen hatte, schloss sie acht folgende Tage lang, *als ob sie ihn gebessert hätte*, in sein Gebet ein. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 86ff, my emphasis)

"As if she had made him a better person," exceeds the mere condition of conformity with moral laws but further implies the power to effect and change others. Käthchen does this through the mere wave of her hand. This gesture is just a greeting, unrelated to any form of consecration, and suggests Käthchen's unawareness of her actions towards the good. I read this particular unconsciousness in relation to Schiller's thoughts on the unawareness of the *beautiful soul* towards the beauty of her act.[51]

The notion of the *beautiful soul* alluded to in the figure of Käthchen is reemphasized just a few lines later in the text, when Strahl exclaims:

> Der Graf vom Strahl. Käthchen, Käthchen, Käthchen! Du, deren junge *Seele*, […] von wollüstiger *Schönheit* gänzlich triefte. (*KVH* 2.1, lines 690ff, my emphasis)

Reading "Schönheit" here against the backdrop of the beautiful soul opens several productive inquiries into the expression "wollüstig triefende Schönheit" ("voluptuously dripping beauty") and its ironic character but most important for this study is the description of her *soul* as *beautiful*. The word choice here in this passage reinforces the connection between Käthchen's character and the concept of beauty and grace of the eighteenth century. In introducing her, Theobald projects the idealistic picture of a type of woman who acts only according to ethical norms and who is not recognized as having her own will:

> Theobald. […] auf meine Frage: […] willst du ihn? antwortete [sie]: Vater! Dein Wille sei meiner. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 102ff)

While financially independent, due to her inheritance of a county estate, Käthchen is not described as having any power of decision but only as living within the norms of expectation set

[51] See Schiller, p. 111: "Daher weiß [die schöne Seele] selbst auch niemals um die Schönheit ihres Handelns, und es fällt ihr nicht mehr ein, daß man anders handeln und empfinden könnte."

by specific aesthetic and idealistic paradigms of the eighteenth century, values that Theobald verbalizes upon her departure a few lines later:

> Verläßt mich und alles, woran *Pflicht, Gewohnheit und Natur* sie knüpften. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 207ff, my emphasis)

"Pflicht, Gewohnheit und Natur" ("duty, habit, and nature") reverberate with Schiller's terminology in his discussion of feminine grace, while the balance of duty and nature is a concept even more explicitly represented in Schiller's definition of the beautiful soul.

In Schiller's formulation, it is here where a perfect concurrence of the two virtues is reached:

> In einer schönen Seele ist es also, wo Sinnlichkeit und Vernunft, Pflicht und Neigung harmonieren, und Grazie ist ihr Ausdruck in der Erscheinung. Nur im Dienst einer schönen Seele kann die Natur zugleich Freiheit besitzen und ihre Form bewahren. (111)

The effortlessness of this harmony lies in its unintentionality as a habitual concurrence of naturality and acquired actions. In the above passage from Kleist's *Käthchen*, "habit" ("Gewohnheit") expresses the subconscious intersection of duty and nature, which acts with respect to moral and ethical laws, as well as natural sensuality. I thus interpret the triad "duty, habit, and nature" in relation to paradigms found in Schiller's definition of the beautiful soul, concepts distinctly echoed in the terms that Theobald marshals to describe Käthchen and that reflect the bourgeois ideas of an ideal type generated by a masculine understanding of the feminine.

Worth considering in this context is David Wellbery's analysis of *Das Erbeben in Chili*, a novella to which I have recurred above to demonstrate Kleist's particular style of "dramatic narration" and show how he is blending the boundaries between genres ("Semiotische Anmerkungen"). Adopting the perspective of semiotic literary criticism, Wellbery writes, "die Konturen der Figuren [werden] durch allgemein erkennbare thematische Rollen […] bestimmt"

("Semiotische Anmerkungen" 70-71). For Wellbery, Kleist's literary text operates through "kodifizierten Schemata" rather than the provision of specific individualizations of the figure: "Von primärer Wichtigkeit sind hier Rollen und Positionen, nicht Individuen" ("Semiotische Anmerkungen" 71). I want to lean on this idea, as in Kleist's play as well, we learn no in-depth facets of Käthchen's individual character in her introduction, only contours – we are presented with outlines, the framework of her character and the effect she has on others around her. It is the figure of a modest daughter, fully in line with eighteenth-century aesthetic paradigms of beauty and grace. Before even appearing on stage, her father's monologue draws a picture of her that will remain a literary representation until Käthchen enters in the second scene.

We then learn that, despite the correlation between her father's account of her contours and the outlines of the idealistic aesthetic paradigm, Käthchen does the unthinkable:

> Theobald. […] Und da wir ans Fenster treten: schmeißt sich das Mädchen, in dem Augenblick, da er seinen Streithengst besteigt, dreißig Fuß hoch, mit aufgehobenen Händen auf das Pflaster der Straße nieder: gleich einer Verlorenen, die ihrer fünf Sinne beraubt ist! Und bricht sich beide Lenden, ihr heiligen Herren, beide zarten Lendchen, dicht über des Knierunds elfenbeinernen Bau; und ich […] muss sie, auf meinen Schultern, wie zu Grabe tragen […]. Hier liegt sie nun, auf dem Todbett, in der Glut des hitzigen Fiebers, sechs endlose Wochen, ohne sich zu regen. Keinen Laut bringt sie hervor […]. Und prüft, da sie sich ein wenig erholt hat, den Schritt, und schnürt ihr Bündel, und tritt, beim Strahl der Morgensonne, in die Tür: wohin? fragt sie die Magd; zum Grafen Wetter vom Strahl, antwortet sie, und verschwindet. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 181ff)

It is striking that, despite this account of a presumably rather painful fall, the moment of Käthchen jumping out of the window achieves a comic result. Why should the mental image of a young girl, jumping from nine meters onto the cobble stones have this effect? Of several possible answers to this question, I want to explore one by drawing on the sixteenth-century *commedia dell'arte*, as I believe the focus on the body as an instrument of expression so central to that

theatrical tradition can be fruitfully compared to Kleist's, in that one of the characteristic aspects of the *commedia dell'arte* was its emphasis of bodily expressions over speech.

Throughout Theobald's monologue, Käthchen, upon meeting Strahl, is not mentioned to utter a word until the wounds from her jump have healed. Then she abruptly announces she is leaving to follow Strahl:

> Theobald. […] Hier liegt sie nun, auf dem Todbett, in der Glut des hitzigen Fiebers, sechs endlose Wochen, ohne sich zu regen. Keinen Laut bringt sie hervor […]. Und prüft, da sie sich ein wenig erholt hat, den Schritt, und schnürt ihr Bündel, und tritt […] in die Tür: wohin? Fragt sie die Magd; *zum Grafen Wetter vom Strahl, antwortet sie*, und verschwindet. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 190ff)

While a line can be drawn between Käthchen's momentous bodily expression (the silent jump) and the focus on physicality in the earlier Italian theatrical form, the jump in *Käthchen* is an even bolder contradiction of the character or "type" that had been presented through the words of her father's elaborate and expansive description. She meets none of the characteristics that he used to describe her. To again use Wellbery's wording, the "contours" that had just been drawn before are now shattered.

As shown earlier, the deviation at play in the comic can be recognized in its overstepping of norms. Käthchen's falling out of the window is a falling out of the idealistic gender norms and expectations that were set for her figure. It is a literal *aus dem (Fenster-)Rahmen fallen*, a falling out of the framework, a breaking with expectations and norms, resulting in – and performed through – a breaking of her body. But the comic of the moment of her fall can also be read as incongruity. Her action appears ridiculous as it fails to align with the bourgeois concept (*Begriff*) of grace prevalent at the time. A paradox emerges between Theobald's description of his daughter's character or type and her action.

To understand the comic effect at play, Arthur Schopenhauer's thoughts on humor and incongruity are constructive:

> der Ursprung des Lächerlichen [ist] die paradoxe und daher unerwartete Subsumtion eines Gegenstandes unter einen ihm übrigens heterogenen Begriff, und bezeichnet demgemäß das Phänomen des Lachens allemal die plötzliche Wahrnehmung einer Inkongruenz zwischen einem solchen Begriff und dem durch denselben gedachten realen Gegenstand, also zwischen dem Abstrakten und dem Anschaulichen. (92)

Schopenhauer's theory of perception of incongruity as the reason for humor applies to the depiction of Käthchen in Kleist's text, where the concept given by her father is incompatible with her actions. The moment her body falls from the window marks her stepping out of the aesthetic norm. The breaking of her bones, right above the knees, is representative of her physical break with – and breaking of – the embodiment of an idealistic concept, but it is striking that the poetological realization of this breaking and falling out results in yet another description of her body:

> Theobald. […] schmeißt sich das Mädchen […] dreißig Fuß hoch, mit aufgehobenen Händen, auf das Pflaster der Straße nieder: gleich einer Verlorenen, die ihrer fünf Sinne beraubt ist! Und bricht sich beide Lenden, ihr heiligen Herren, beide zarten Lendchen (*KVH* 1.1, lines 181ff)

Theobald's monologue is a narrative within the theatrical play that, like teichoscopy, causes an intensified inclusion of the audience.[52] I will below offer a closer discussion of the narrative given in this monologue and its relation to different dramatic settings but it should be noted here that the focus of the description lies on her body and bodily gestures.

A close reading of the passage above reveals that the wording in the text describes her movement not as jumping (*Springen*) but as throwing (*Schmeißen*). Käthchen is neither moving

[52] See also Rommel, p. 126: "Die Fantasie des Publikums ist hier [in der Teichoskopie] in besonderer Weise gefordert, denn die Zuschauer werden für einen kurzen Moment zu reinen Zuhörern, die einem einzigen Sprecher lauschen. Der dramatische Bericht führt auf diese Art zu einer besonders intensiven Einbeziehung des ganzen Theaters."

her body out of the window through active muscle force nor falling unconsciously but is described as "*throwing herself*" ("schmeißt sich") to the ground. I am reading the expression "down onto the paving" ("auf das Pflaster nieder") in relation to the comic of the lower senses. The young woman does not jump *after* the knight but throws herself down onto the street in a straight, *downward* movement. As discussed in the previous chapter, according to A. W. Schlegel, the comic is closely related to low, animalistic drives that yield a comic effect within a hierarchy of (upper) reason and lower senses. The fact that her downward fall happens at the same time that Strahl is climbing *upward* onto his horse, moreover, creates an intriguing movement by which he counters or even complements Käthchen's fall:

> Theobald. [S]chmeißt sich das Mädchen in dem Augenblick, da er den Streithengst *besteigt* […] nieder (*KVH* 1.1, lines 182ff, my emphasis)

But the movement is not simply a simultaneous up-and-down. The moment that Strahl is set to leave is indeed charged with sexual connotation.[53] He is mounting his horse – a "Streithengst," a strong, masculine, and potent stallion – and while Strahl displays his own masculinity, Käthchen falls low. Furthermore, the term "mounting" (*besteigen*) is in itself a euphemism for copulation, which intensifies the sexual charges of the scene. The term is often used in correlation with male animals who mount the female, a notion perfectly emphasized in Strahl's mounting the potent stallion. One could even argue that the movements *up* (for Strahl) and *down* (for Käthchen), *in* (the room) and *out* (of the window) mimic the motions of a sexual act.

As regards the element of the comic, though, the reciprocal movement of *up* and *down* not only differentiates between the male and female through the opposite directions in which their bodies are moving but also explicitly traces Käthchen's movement towards a lower position. This lowering motion, in connection with the sexual connotations evoked by the

[53] See also Reeve, pp. 34ff.

moment of Strahl mounting the horse, invites the application of Schlegel's thoughts on the comic and "animalistic instincts" (134). The comic effect, then, lies not only in the incongruence of the concept of the graceful Käthchen leaping out a window but also in the shift towards the "sole hegemony of the lower drives."

Additionally, the reflexive pronoun *sich*, in "schmeißt sich das Mädchen," indicates an objectification that refers back to the body: grammatically, in the clause "schmeißt sich das Mädchen," "das Mädchen" is the subject and "sich" is the direct object. She is throwing her body, her*self* down to the ground. This objectification entails a rupture, a break between reason and physicality, which leads readers to ask whether it is in fact consciousness that is throwing the body voluntarily ("freiwillig") – in Schlegel's words – and completely giving in to the animalistic drives.[54] When Käthchen's body drops onto the street, it therefore not only marks the moment that reveals the essence of the comic in breaking with norms but it is also – in its objectification, grammatical and otherwise – brought down to its physical essence. The fall expresses very human and animalistic drives and, at the same time, generates a comic effect of a different nature, not one that is solely expressed through language or through a given physical flaw, grotesque grimace or feature, but instead one in which the body itself functions as a medium of representation.

Kleist's subtle twist here, however, is that the entire scene is still narrated by a person on stage: we do not see Käthchen's body fall and break other than through our perception of Theobald's dramatic account of it. The specific link between the narrative and dramatic – and its impact on the theatricality and spatial structures of the drama – will be further discussed below but we can already see that it is a representation of Käthchen's body within the body of the text.

[54] While a discussion of subject-object relations could be added here, I focus on the comic aspects of this excerpt.

As has been mentioned, the *commedia dell'arte* emphasized the body as a whole through the gestures of the figure on stage, in a movement similar to that at play in Kleist's text, only here the figure's body is brought into prominence on a semantic level. As we have seen, it is only within the text that Käthchen's body outperforms the narrative of the graceful daughter. Without showing her on stage, Kleist manages to place Käthchen's body in the center of a scene that is emphasizing that very body as a whole by letting it be the entity that breaks with the normative construct. The break at the end of this sophisticated repositioning, as shown above, creates a comic effect.

Aside from the concepts of incongruence and the overstepping of norms discussed above in their evocation of the comic, another aspect that deserves attention is the moment of tension. Immanuel Kant's thoughts on laughter have already been summarized in the first chapter of this dissertation as a sudden release of tension into nothingness and here it will be particularly helpful to return to this theory to gain a deeper understanding of the comic effect at work in Kleist's *Käthchen*. Theobald's monologue reflects the accrual of several moments of tension. Even before its climax, the sudden drop from nine meters above the ground, we find a number of more minor buildups and releases in the first meeting of Käthchen and Strahl:

> Theobald. […] nötig ihn [Strahl] auf einen Sessel, in des Zimmers Mitte nieder, und: Wein! ruf ich in die Türe, und vom frischgeräucherten Schinken, zum Imbiss! und während draußen noch der Streithengst wiehert, und, mit den Pferden der Knechte, den Grund zerstampft, daß der Staub, als wär ein Cherub vom Himmel niedergefahren, emporquoll: öffnet langsam, ein großes, flaches Silbergeschirr auf dem Kopf tragend, auf welchem Flaschen, Gläser und der Imbiss gestellt waren, das Mädchen die Türe und tritt ein […]. Geschirr und Becher und Imbiss, da sie den Ritter erblickt, lässt sie fallen; und leichenbleich, mit Händen wie zur Anbetung verschränkt, den Boden mit Brust und Scheiteln küssend, *stürzt sie* vor ihm nieder, als ob ein Blitz sie niedergeschmettert hätte! Und da ich sage: Herr meines Lebens! Was fehlt dem Kind? Und sie aufhebe: schlingt sie, wie ein Taschenmesser zusammenfallend, den Arm um mich,

> das Antlitz flammend auf ihn gerichtet, als ob sie eine Erscheinung hätte. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 148ff)

This first encounter is dramatically staged and characterized by a stark deceleration. Already before Käthchen is recounted entering, her entrance is further delayed by Theobald's extensive descriptions of the scene. The first syntagma "und:" here functions as an opening to the lengthy account, the colon once more highlighting the dramatic character of his narration, as this punctuation mark can also be used to indicate direct speech ("und: Wein! ruf ich").

The long prelude that follows is a list of descriptions, connected by the conjunction "und" ("*und* vom frischgeräucherten Schinken […] *und* setz einen Schemel […] *Und* während […] *und*, mit den Pferden"), creating proliferating detail, and intensifying the anticipation of the encounter between Käthchen and Strahl. This anticipation then peaks as clouds of rising dust appear, dramatically staging the arrival of an "angel" ("als wär ein Cherub vom Himmel niedergefahren"), repeating the notion of Käthchen as a "heavenly creature" and giving the audience – the court, as well as the audience and readers of the play – yet another indication of her idealization. The following "öffnet" ("opens") is again preceded by a colon, giving the impression that the dust is slowly opening, like a curtain on to another stage (*KVH* 1.1, lines 155ff: "Staub [der] emporquoll: öffnet"). At the height of this anticipation, however, the release of tension is slowed down once more by the term "langsam" ("slowly") and the following listing of objects Käthchen is carrying: "öffnet *langsam*, ein großes, flaches Silbergeschirr auf dem Kopf tragend, auf welchem Flaschen, Gläser und der Imbiss gestellt waren" (*KVH* 1.1, lines 155ff, my emphasis). Finally, after the crescendo and all the anticipation comes the first release "öffnet […] das Mädchen die Türe *und tritt ein*" (*KVH* 1.1, lines 155ff, my emphasis).

Given that Theobald's story purports to recount how Strahl bewitched his daughter, the audience is expecting the big reveal of the bedevilment.[55] Slowing down their first encounter by making the only outcome Käthchen's mere entrance in the room, builds up the suspension, only to release it – at its peak – into nothing. Her entrance is neither contrary to the expectation (the evidence of some spell) nor fulfilling it. It offers nothing towards the revelation of Theobald's accusations towards Strahl.[56] A second crescendo of tension and release comes on the heels of this first sequence as soon as Käthchen catches sight of Strahl. Here, another accumulation of hypotactic insertions is again released into nothing: "Geschirr und Becher und Imbiss, da sie den Ritter erblickt, lässt sie fallen" (*KVH* 1.1, lines 160ff). The dropping of food and dishes abruptly suspends the tension into more similarly unrelated nothingness, as with her entrance. The audience's attention is led to the props that Käthchen is carrying. Their placement at the beginning of the clause emphasizes them, suggesting they played a central role in Theobald's narration of his daughter's bewitchment, but this significance is released in an action that is sudden but unrevealing in regards to the accusations, generating another comic moment.

In Kant's discussion of the comic, he describes the relationship between amusement and resulting laughter through sudden release of tension. We can see aspects of this theory represented in the passages of *Käthchen* presented here, above all in their use of suspense and release and their comic effect. But such aspects of the Kantian theory should be read here not as mere hermeneutic tools but in fact as an excessive, exaggerated use of this effect. Through the

[55] Theobald accuses Strahl of black magic and confederation with the devil and tells his story in front of the Vehmic court: "Ich klage ihn schändlicher Zauberei, aller Künste der schwarzen Nacht und der Verbrüderung mit dem Satan an! […] Wenn ihr mich gleichwohl reden lassen wollt, so denke ich es durch eine schlichte Erzählung dessen, was sich zugetragen dahin zu bringen, daß ihr aufbrecht und ruft: unsrer sind dreizehn und der vierzehnte ist der Teufel! zu den Türen rennt und den Wald, der diese Höhle umgibt, auf dreihundert Schritte im Umkreis, mit euren Taftmänteln und Federhüten besäet" (*KVH* 1.1, lines 32ff).

[56] In his *Critique of Pure Judgement*, Kant stresses the release into nothingness and states that a positive contrary fulfillment of the expectation cannot be considered as such: "Man muß wohl bemerken, daß sie sich nicht in das positive Gegenteil des erwarteten Gegenstandes – denn das ist immer etwas und kann oft betrüben –, sondern in nichts verwandeln müsse" (230).

perpetual repetition of the same comic effect, the effect itself becomes subject to absurdity, which not only emphasizes the humorous outcome, but also turns the comic in on itself, as a comic of a comic, increasing the potential for ridicule through its very concept.

In her final act of dropping to the ground, we see a third sequence of suspense and release: "und leichenbleich, mit Händen wie zur Anbetung verschränkt, den Boden mit Brust und Scheiteln küssend, stürzt sie vor ihm nieder" (*KVH* 1.1, lines 161ff, my emphasis). The sentence structure comprises the familiar succession of descriptions and the transposition of the verb and subject to the end of the clause (*KVH* 1.1, lines 160ff, my emphasis: "Geschirr und Becher und Imbiss, da sie den Ritter erblickt, *lässt sie fallen*"), creating a delay on a syntactic as well as narrative level. But here instead we find a strong focus on Käthchen's bodily gestures – "Den Boden mit Brust und Scheiteln küssend" ("Kissing the ground with chest and head") – indicating that several parts of her body are invested in the act of submissiveness. Furthermore, the focus is on her chest and head, her heart and her mind, suggesting that her worshipping gesture is both affectionate and mental, at once emotional and rational. I read this first fall onto the ground as a complement to Käthchen's jump out of the window. At first, she falls on the floor in front of Strahl, while in the second movement she falls behind him, as he rides away on his horse. In addition to the spatial complementation of falling in front of him and behind him, Käthchen in their first encounter is still actively moving ("küssend") but, as discussed above, in her fall from the window she is not represented as actively jumping. Aside from this physical activity, there is an underlying indication of her emotions and reason (through the specific mention of her chest and head), which implies her character and subjectivity. When she drops herself from the window, however, the emphasis is placed on the objectivity of her body. This succession

suggests once more the break between reason and physicality discussed above, a turn and focus on physicality.

About a century after Kleist's *Käthchen* was first published and enacted, Henri Bergson in 1900 wrote his theory on laughter, *Le rire: essai sur la signification du comique*, in which he inquires into the source of laughter and focuses especially on laughter as an effect of the comic. Bergson conceptualizes what I will show can, to a certain extent, already be seen in Kleist's play: human behavior that appears comic when it resembles a mechanical movement (for example, Käthchen's repetitive dropping to the ground). Bergson's focus on the comic is again centered on the movements and gestures of the body, the same focus poetologically represented in Kleist's text: "Dès que le souci du corps intervient, une infiltration comique est à craindre."[57] The figure of Käthchen is an aesthetic representation of this "infiltration of the comic," as it is her body that generates the comic effect.

Before turning to a different scope of expressions that Käthchen is giving through her gestures and movements, I would like to address mechanical motions more fully. Aside from the close connection between the comic and the body, Bergson focuses on the humorous effects of mechanized movements. Without doing an in-depth discussion of his study, one of the main features of the comic through mechanical action is repetition:

> *Les attitudes, gestes et mouvements du corps humain sont risibles dans l'exacte mesure où ce corps nous fait penser à une simple mécanique*. […] C'est que la vie bien vivante ne devrait pas se répéter. Là où il y a répétition, similitude complète, nous soupçonnons du mécanique fonctionnant derrière le vivant […]. Cet infléchissement de la vie dans la direction de la mécanique est ici la vraie cause du rire.[58]

[57] See Bergson, p. 42: "As soon as one is concerned with the body, an infiltration of the comic has to be feared."
[58] See Bergson, p. 35 (my emphasis): "*Because it reminds us of a simple machine, the attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion*. […] True, vivid life should never repeat itself. Wherever we find repetition and complete similarity, we suspect a mechanical force behind the living […]. This shift of life towards the mechanical is here the true cause of laughter."

Applying the lens of Bergson's theory enables a more penetrating discussion of the comic at play as developed in Kleist's text and on his stage, particularly in the aesthetic representation of the bodies, their gestures and movements. First, Bergson indicates a connection between repetition and laughter. Repetitive movements remind us of a mechanical force at play, an inflexibility that lies within this repetition and that indicates an inhuman, rigid motion. Bergson also discusses inflexibility, in contrast to the form of elasticity expected within a living body. He defines the perpetually active "flame," the higher and elastic principle, as our soul.[59] While the soul is characterized by elasticity, inflexibility, which lies in repetitive, mechanical movements, is mere physical inertia.

In the first act of Kleist's *Käthchen*, we see a similar mechanical repetition in her falls, in the dropping of her body and in objects being dropped on the ground. In light of Bergson's account, we can interpret the repetitive movement in *Käthchen* as a stylistic device to evoke the comic and we can see how her body, in its corporeal inflexibility, emphasizes the focus on physicality and its comic effect: "D'où venait ici le comique? De ce que le corps vivant se raidissait en machine."[60] Line 166 of *Käthchen* features a striking example of this "living body that became rigid like a machine" when Theobald compares Käthchen's body to a pocketknife: "wie ein Taschenmesser zusammenfallend" (*KVH* 1.1). Along these lines, Bergson's *Le rire* is even more fruitful for interpreting Käthchen's drop out of the window. We have heretofore focused on the frame out of which she throws herself, a scene understood in relation to the comic

[59] See Bergson, p. 52: "Le corps vivant nous semblait donc devoir être la souplesse parfaite, l'activité toujours en éveil d'un principe toujours en travail. Mais cette activité appartiendrait réellement à l'âme plutôt qu'au corps. Elle serait la flamme même de la vie, allumée en nous par un principe supérieur, et aperçue à travers le corps par un effet de transparence" ("It seemed to us that the living body ought to be flexibility in perfection, an ever alert activity of a principle that is always at work. However, this activity really belongs to the soul rather than the body. It would be the very flame of life, sparked within us by a higher principle and shining through our body").
[60] See Bergson, p. 52: "Where does the comic come from here? It comes from the living body that became rigid like a machine."

through her falling out of norms or incongruence, but Bergson's theory now allows us to analyze further how the moment of Käthchen's body falling onto the paving is comical.

The discussion of the scene above treated Käthchen's objectification and the rupture between her physicality and reason at the moment of throwing herself from the window. Bergson's piece on laughter discusses a similar phenomenon when he elaborates on the inflexibility of the body and the active principle of a soul always at work:

> Mais supposons qu'on appelle notre attention sur cette matérialité du corps. Supposons qu'au lieu de participer de la légèreté du principe qui l'anime, le corps ne soit plus à nos yeux qu'une enveloppe lourde et embarrassante, lest importun qui retient à terre une âme impatiente de quitter le sol. Alors le corps deviendra pour l'âme ce que le vêtement était tout à l'heure pour le corps lui-même, une matière inerte posée sur une énergie vivante. Et l'impression du comique se produira dès que nous aurons le sentiment net de cette superposition.[61]

In the moment of Käthchen's leap, it is her body that is thrown out of the window, a construction that reveals the break in the relationship between body and mind and results in a comic effect.

This becomes even more apparent in light of remarks Bergson makes earlier:

> Quand nous ne voyons dans le corps vivant que grâce et souplesse, c'est que nous négligeons ce qu'il y a en lui de pesant, de résistant, de matériel enfin; nous oublions sa matérialité pour ne penser qu'à sa vitalité, vitalité que notre imagination attribue au principe même de la vie intellectuelle et morale.[62]

We have seen the same focus on "grâce et souplesse" ("grace and flexibility") in Theobald's perception of his daughter in his testimony to the Vehmic court, where his neglect to see the "materiality" and "resistance" of the body evidenced the relationship of body and mind at work in the text, the "superposition" of the weighing physicality on the living energy. Käthchen's body

[61] See Bergson, p. 52: "However, let us suppose that our attention is drawn towards this materiality of the body; that, instead of sharing the lightness of the animating principle, the body is no more to our eyes than a heavy and cumbersome shell, an unwelcome ballast, holding down on the ground the soul, which is eager to rise. Then the body will become to the soul what clothing just before was to the body, an inert matter that is weighing on a living energy. The impression of the comic will appear in the moment that we have a clear sense of this overlay."
[62] See Bergson, p. 52: "When we only see grace and flexibility in the living body, it is because we disregard that in it, there is weight, resistance, and, finally, matter; we forget its materiality and only think of its vitality, a vitality, which we consider as derived from the very principle of intellectual and moral life."

is not described as falling after Strahl, or leaping into his direction, but simply as dropping down onto the stones. It is the "lest importun qui retient à terre une âme impatiente de quitter le sol," the weight and inflexibility of her body that drops from the window and shatters on the paving. Through Theobald's description of his daughter, we are offered a perspective that fails to see beyond the normative framework of the graceful woman. As I have shown above, Theobold's limitations disregard the person as a whole endowed with animalistic drives, the "lower needs," as well as with physical rigidity, as Bergson calls it. The comic comes into being once we see the bodily inflexibility revealed in the fall of her body from the window. While I read Käthchen's body as the medium or foil for a representation of the comic itself, Theobald's account of his daughter, as we have seen in other sections of this study, is significant for the development of the humorous effect.

Though written as a literary text, Kleist's *Käthchen* was created to be enacted on stage.[63] Focusing more precisely here on its different dramatic settings and the "overlayering of stages," I would like to take a closer look at the theatrical and narrative elements of the text, which are not always clearly separated, as we saw in Theobald's dramatic account in the beginning of the play. I argue in this part of this chapter that there is not only one theatrical stage to be acted out and visualized for the audience but in fact a complexity of overlayed stages with various audiences and actors that blend, transgress and calling into question the limits of theatrical representation within the literary text. The full title of the play, *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn oder die Feuerprobe ein großes historisches Ritterschauspiel*, already gives an explicit reference that we are about to see a theatrical, fictional performance. Leaving aside the question of the play actually being a "great historical knight spectacle," it is certainly a play ("Schauspiel"). The

[63] Heinrich von Kleist writes to Heinrich Joseph von Collin on October 2, 1808: "Das Käthchen von Heilbronn, das ich für die Bühne bearbeitet habe, lege ich Ew. Hochwohlgeb. hiermit ergebenst, zur Durchsicht und Prüfung, ob es zu diesem Zweck tauglich sei, bei" (*BKA* 4: 3, pp. 229ff).

performance begins with a scene at a secret Vehmic court in an underground cave, where disguised counts, knights, and gentlemen serve as judges and members of the court. Theobald and the accused Friedrich Wetter vom Strahl stand before them.

With three sides enclosed and one open, the shape of a cave is very similar to the spatial organization of a theatrical stage, inviting my reading of the court as a secondary stage. Its theatrical character further is emphasized through the historical institution of the Vehmic court itself. The members of this court – at its height in the fifteenth century but lasting well into the eighteenth century – were counts, originally appointed to rule and oversee specific legal districts, but eventually the Vehmic courts independently extended their jurisdiction, becoming a secret organization (Hoke 110ff). The counts' assumption of roles in a high court of justice is related to theatrical play-acting, in that, upon entering the court, they are acting out their function within that judicial system. In Kleist's *Käthchen*, we find this secret court consisting of counts, knights and nobles *acting* as judges and dressed in costumes, as reflected in the stage directions to the first scene of the first act:

> Graf Otto von der Flühe als Vorsitzender, Wenzel von Nachtheim, Hans von Bärenklau als Beisassen, mehrere Grafen, Ritter und Herren, sämtlich vermummt.[64]

I read this opening to the very first scene as a stage within the stage, a multiplication of theaters: actors on stage, acting as counts and noblemen, but also acting as members of the Vehmic court. Through this multiplication at the very the opening of the play, we are already confronted with the margins of the stage and we are made to see the shifting of borders of – and within – the theatrical institution.

That the judges in the Vehmic court are themselves actors also entails a multiplication of acting. They are performers within their acting role, characters on the stage of Kleist's *Käthchen*

[64] See *KVH* 1.1 in *SW* 1: 431.

and actors in the arena of the Vehmic court. Furthermore, when Theobald enters the stage of the Vehmic court to deliver his monologic account on Strahl's bewitching of his daughter, the acting judges also become spectators to the scenes he is narrating. While Theobald's account is nominally led by questions from the Vehmic judges, they offer only minimal involvement and dramatic representation and their questions, exemplifying Manfred Pfister's thoughts on "dialogical exposition" ("Dialogische Exposition"), are merely a tool to motivate Theobald's narration.[65] This trading of roles between actors and spectators intensifies the convoluted structure of stages and acting figures proposed in the play. Theobald's account provides the background information relevant to the "events of the dramatic present," the play we are reading or seeing on stage. But in *Käthchen*, unlike with Pfister's argument, the counterparts in the conversation (for example, Graf Otto and Hans von Bärenklau) do reappear in the play as councils to the Emperor. I thus not only read it as an exposition but also as a "theatrical narrative," wherein a dialogue can multiply the stage and the acting of the figures and, moreover, overlay narration and performance, creating noteworthy aesthetic complexity.

Theobald's account receives its dialogical structure through the questions of the Vehmic judges, closely linking narration, theatrical dialogue and performance in this scene. The longer elaborations and descriptions recount Käthchen's story in a narrative, while the questions of the court, as well as the representation on the stage – or stages – dramatize this scene. In addition, Theobald's account is characterized by a number of terms that invite his narrative to be read as a

[65] Manfred Pfister defines *exposition* as "die Vergabe von informationen über die in der Vergangenheit liegenden und die Gegenwart bestimmenden Voraussetzungen und Gegebenheiten der unmittelbar dramatisch präsentierten Situationen" (124: "providing information about past events that determine situations and events of the dramatic present"). Dialogical exposition, according to Pfister, then "consists in providing a dialog partner alongside the bearer of expository information" (132). This, however, is the only function of the dialog partner, who will then disappear from the play afterwards: "[Dialogische Exposition] besteht darin, dem Träger der Expositionsinformation einen Dialogpartner zur Seite zu stellen, der keine andere Funktion hat, als die expositorische Informationsvergabe durch Fragen und Einwürfe zu motivieren, und der nach Erfüllug dieser Funktion aus dem Stüch verschwindet" (132).

performance. I have already used the term "props" for the objects that Käthchen carries into the room when Theobald calls for her to serve the wine and meat, a term justified by Kleist's description of this scene. What Theobald is presenting here is yet another theatrical "stage," and further inspection reveals several descriptions that read like a portrayal of a scene taking place on a stage, only with Theobald's workshop as its setting.

Strahl arrives with his horse, makes his entrance and is seated on a chair in the middle of the room. Theobald situates himself in front of him and calls out for refreshments. Following his prompt, Käthchen is said to appear but, as mentioned above, her entrance is deferred:

> Theobald. Und während draußen noch der Streithengst wiehert, und, mit den Pferden der Knechte, den Grund zerstampft, daß der Staub, als wäre ein Cherub vom Himmel niedergefahren, emporquoll: öffnet langsam, ein großes, flaches Silbergeschirr auf dem Kopf tragend, auf welchem Flaschen, Gläser und der Imbiss gestellt waren, das Mädchen die Türe und tritt ein. (*KVH* 1.1, lines 152ff)

This passage describes a staged appearance with clouds of dust creating a dramatic effect for Käthchen's eventual entrance. Her appearance, moreover, is charged with suspense by the delay brought about by Theobold listing the objects she is carrying, as well as through the slowly opening door, which together emphasize the dramatic composition of this scene. While Theobald mentions her making an *entrance* ("tritt *ein*," my emphasis), this theatrical situation is representing her making an *appearance* on the scene (*auf*-treten). While presented as a narrative, the scene created is in fact the account of a theatrical stage, the detailed information about the objects in the space ("ein großes, flaches Silbergeschirr") not only visualizing the stage and its particularities but also providing step-by-step stage directions on the dramatic scene that Theobald is narrating. What follows Theobold's initial description is his account of Käthchen's first fall onto the ground, which caused numerous people to gather and bemoan the young woman's injury:

Theobald. Gesellen und Mägde strömen herbei und jammern: hilf Himmel! Was ist dem Jüngferlein widerfahren? (*KVH* 1.1, lines 69ff)

This convergence of onlookers forms yet another group of spectators, beholding the scene that Theobald has unfolded before the inner eyes of the Vehmic judges and also the audience and readers of Kleist's play.

Following Käthchen's leap from the window, another scene indicates the description of a theatrical setting within Theobald's narrative, when Strahl is next mentioned after having mounted his horse and taken off: "indessen er dort, den Gott verdamme! zu Pferd, unter dem Volk das herbeiströmt, herrüberruft *von hinten*, was vorgefallen sei!" (*KVH* 1.1, line 191, my emphasis). The text does not refer to the man on the horse as shouting from outside or afar but instead as calling *from behind*, emphasizing the spatial dimensions of a stage. After his appearance in the workshop scene, Strahl moves backstage, while the crowd of spectators moves in the opposite direction. Only if we read the shout from behind in connection with a theatrical setting and as coming from behind the scene, does the wording of the text result as semantically logical.

Through constructions as the ones above, I read the first scene of *Käthchen* as an aesthetic representation of different theatrical and narrated stages. The dramatic text offers a poetological reflection of the stage itself and, as shown above, both proliferates and interweaves the theatrical settings. By creating settings such as these within the dramatic text, on the stage as well as in the narrative monologue, there is not only an overlay of multiplied stages but also a transgression of the boundaries between aesthetic art forms and literary forms. With this transgression, exponentiation and multiplication of forms of representation, Kleist is challenging and calling into question lines between theatrical and literary aesthetics.

Above I referenced the *commedia dell'arte* as a theatrical form in which the actors' masks enable the body as a whole to become the most important instrument of expression. While for most characters in this theatrical form the shape of the mask symbolizes their type, it is the bodily movements that shape their performance. The inability of *commedianti* to use mimic art, due to the use of masks covering the facial expressions, relegates all expressiveness to the body and its gestures. This chapter has adopted a similar focus when analyzing the body and bodily expressions of Käthchen. Kleist's text places particular emphasis on physicality, which is closely linked to moments of overstepping and breaking out of set frameworks and norms. This physical deviation, as I have shown throughout this discussion, generates a form particular of comedy, but one for which the humorous effect cannot be pinpointed to a singular cause. As seen above, the comic we find in Kleist's text is a compounded complexity of humorous aspects, all reflected in the representation of Käthchen's body.

Despite the variety of elements from different theoretical approaches of the comic, one recurring aspect that evokes a comical effect was found in her incongruity with a norm. Käthchen's falling, leaping and dropping on the ground and the breaking of her bones are gestures of overstepping and transgression. The window frame from which she falls symbolizes the framework she is stepping out of – in these moments, her body is not only falling out of various lines (the lines recounted by her father or the physical boundaries of the window) but also marking them and making them apparent. While the emphasis of my analysis lies on the comic, these visualizations of boundaries and limits through transgression are another form of Kleist's theatrical and literary critique. Through the stepping over into realms that lie outside of the known limits of understanding, thought or behavior, the current boundaries are called into question. The absurdity of Käthchen's behavior develops as it fails to align with Theobald's

account of her character but the leap and her injuries are the result of her breaking out of former realms, breaking into a sphere that lies beyond her father's perspective. With its representation of aspects of an idealistic concept of the female, we can read the fall from the window and the shattering of her body as a break from this school of thought, revealing the limits of this conceptuality as unstable and uncovering a realm outside perceived norms.

While this discussion has been focused on the analysis of the very first scene of the play, I would like to briefly examine the final scene. After first choosing Kunigunde von Thurneck as his bride, Strahl confirms that Käthchen is the Emperor's daughter and is consequently eligible to marry him. In the final ceremony uniting Strahl and his bride, Käthchen, we find her surrounded by male figures: Theobald, the Emperor and Strahl. In this scene, she seems to return to – and accept – a role similar to the one she had earlier broken out of. Upon closer reading, though, the wedding proves a ridiculous scenario that implies that Kleist is ironizing the tradition of a happy ending and Käthchen's return into a patriarchal system. This system is represented in the numerous men and fathers taking her to the altar. Aside from Strahl, her biological father (the Emperor) as well as her stepfather (Theobald) join her in a multiplication of father figures. While representing a male-centered ceremony, the overabundance of male figures walking to the altar creates a preposterous scene. Furthermore, while all three men are fully aware that she will be married to Strahl, Käthchen herself is entirely unaware and confused, since she was led to believe that Kunigunde is the one that Strahl will marry. She is then merely filling the *role* of the bride, dressed up in a wedding gown but taking no active part in the proceedings. Finally, in her response to the question to take Strahl's hand in marriage, she prays "May God and all Saints to protect me" (*KVH* 5.14, line 2678: "Schütze mich Gott und alle Heiligen!"). The ceremony proceeds but Käthchen never utters her consent. With the strage direction "sie sinkt" ("she is

dropping" or "she is fainting") it is not even clear that she is conscious when they are married and the absence of expressed consent calls into question the validity of this ceremony.

On the surface, the final scene could be interpreted as representing Käthchen's return to an order she previously quit, the wedding ceremony symbolizing the reinstalling of male superiority and Käthchen's acceptance of a woman's idealistic role within a patriarchal system. But a closer examination clarifies that it is a forced and not a conscious return. Kleist stages the wedding as an ironic version of a happy ending, overloaded with male and father figures. The conclusion can thus be seen as the injurous restoration of an already deeply distorted system. In the middle is Käthchen, who doesn't even know, out of all the men surrounding her, whose bride she is (*KVH* 5.14, line 2672: "Wessen?"). Her question not only evidences her cluelessness and confusion but also reflects the irony of the scene, as it emphasizes the excess and perhaps an interchangeability of male figures in the societal system that Käthchen (re)enters. Her response to the question whether she "wants him" (*KVH* 5.14, line 2676: "Willst du mich?") and the surplus of male figures, who are giving or taking her hand turn this scene into an absurd ceremony and a ridiculous spectacle:

> Theobald. Willst du dem Grafen deine Hand geben?
> Strahl. *umfaßt sie.* Käthchen! Meine Braut! Willst du mich?
> Käthchen. Schütze mich Gott und alle Heiligen! (*KVH* 5.14, lines 2675ff)

Her missing assent fragments and distorts the performative ceremony.

Although the officiation of the male supremacy proceeds, left unresolved is the critique represented through Käthchen's former leap and physical break with the idealistic conceptualization of norms of conduct and behavior. When the reader looks back upon her fall, the injuries that Käthchen suffers from it can be seen to mark a break with the order and the entering of a new realm. Knees are the body part that expresses submissiveness in the gesture of kneeling down. With her fall from the window, Käthchen breaks both of her legs, the fracture

cleaving right above the kneecaps. This break forces the legs to bend in a different place – this break, then, functions like a new joint. The injury creating a fracture that I read as an inscription, a marker, for her having broken out of the idealistic standards projected upon her by her father. Immediately upon healing, Käthchen is said to examine her ability to walk (*KVH* 1.1, lines 196ff: "prüft […] den Schritt"). But the text gives no indication where her bones healed back together. Hence, the testing of her stride can also be read as a test to walk with her new joints, the result of her breaking her legs. Interpreting her injuries as such allows for a reading of the fractured bones as a breaking out, or breaking with, previous submission to her father while also, at the same time, an inscription of both her resistance to a submissive position (in the breaking of her knees) and acceptance of that same position (in the bending of her knees).[66]

Ultimately, the play does not provide the happy ending expected, especially one with a title claiming it to be a "great historic knightly play" ("großes historisches Ritterschauspiel"). Although there is a wedding before the curtain falls and the two protagonists do end up with each other, the ending, tainted by manipulation and violence, is not *happy*. Käthchen is unaware that she will marry Strahl, Kunigunde is similarly blindsided and threatens him (*KVH* 5.14, lines 2681ff: "Pest, Tod und Rache! Diesen Schimpf sollt ihr mir büßen!"), and we cannot know if Käthchen ever regains consciousness before she is married: she collapses and is caught by the countess Helena, Strahl's mother, then the Emperor tells Strahl to "take her" (*KVH* 5.14, line 2679: "so nehmt sie") and, in the final stage directions to the play, it is mentioned that the

[66] An analysis and closer reading of the specific injuries that Käthchen is suffering would be an interesting addition to this study. A possible direction could be the application of Christine Künzel thoughts in her essay "Gewaltsame Transformationen. Der versehrte weibliche Körper als Text und Zeichen in Kleists *Hermannsschlacht*." Künzel discusses the female body as a threshold between the patriarchal domination. In this case, I would suggest expanding her theory and argue that it is in particular Käthchen's knees that are representing the fragile area (or body part) between the two men. If continuing this thought, the knees are located right above her original joints and if she were to fall onto her newly formed knees, her upper body would not reach the same height in the submissive position, as it did before she broke her bones. The result is an even lower, more excessive subjection. In regards to the afore discussed forms of the comic, this excess can have a similarly humorous, ridiculous effect.

Emperor stands under the canopy "with Käthchen and the count" (*SW* 1: 531). Her state of being is never again mentioned. With this unhappy ending, the play once again breaks with its self-declared genre and the question to which *Käthchen* belongs remains unclear. It is not unusual for one of Kleist's plays to be situated in between genres. In "Versuch über das Tragische," Peter Szondi writes about Kleist's "Wendung zur Komödie (in deren Kulisse […] die Tragödie lauert)" (*Schriften* 248). With his description, Szondi captures the in-between and the perpetually threatening break from the current genre typical of Kleist's dramaturgy and brought even further in *Käthchen*. With the ending of the play, Kleist is breaking with an unclear, "already broken" genre, not just calling the classification itself into question but situating his own work outside of it.

The discussion of different stages, theatrical and narrative elements in the play has shown that not only the body of the figures represents forms of transgression (through bodily movement or the body itself) but also the body of the text that blends and transgresses the lines of literary forms, thereby escaping formalization into a strict literary category. While the text deploys a form of the comic, it also critically looks at normative-bourgeois conceptualizations of female gender. *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* critiques categorizations and limitations and it is through the complexity of comic effects evoked by the *body* that this critique is being represented. The text poetologically reflects Käthchen's stepping out of idealistic norms and categorizations through its representation of bodily gestures and movements, while simultaneously breaking out of literary formalizations of its own through the overlaying and multiplication of theatrical and narrative elements.

In the next chapter, "*Corpora delicti*: Bodies of Evidence," I want to maintain the focus on the body while expanding my analysis to questions and representations of irony. Just as I have

here read *Käthchen* – a play that escapes the classic categorization within drama, declaring itself to be a "great spectacle of knighthood" but preventing its readers and viewers from knowing whether it is a tragedy or a comedy – the following part of my study will look at a play that is labeled a comedy, *Der zerbrochene Krug*.

3 *Corpora delicti*: Bodies of Evidence

In Kleist's play *Der zerbrochne Krug* (*The Broken Jug*), first performed in 1808, we find ourselves witnessing yet another trial. But while only the earliest scenes of *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* had been set in a court, here, this play instead centers entirely around a trial in the village courtroom ("Gerichtsstube") of Huisum, near Utrecht. The titular broken jug, the cause for the trial, belongs to Frau Marthe who accuses Ruprecht, the fiancé of her daughter Eve, of having destroyed it and, over the course of thirteen scenes of court proceedings, it is revealed that the fallible judge Adam presiding over the trial in fact committed the offence himself, breaking the jug as he was fleeing from Eve's room after having tried to extort "shameful favors" (*ZK* 12, lines 1946ff: "Schändliches") from her in exchange for his preventing Ruprecht from being drafted and shipped off to East India, a threat Adam himself fabricated. Seeing that Eve had a late-night visitor, Ruprecht stormed into her room and Adam, in a haste to flee unrecognized, jumped out her window to severe injuries.

Within the wealth of research into Kleist's corpus, the treatment of *Der zerbrochne Krug* has been consistently expansive.[67] In his essay about the comic in the Krug, Frank Schlossbauer

[67] See for example Graham; Gutjahr; von Mücke; and Grathoff, "Der Fall." Frequently discussed are also the historical circumstances of the ideation of the play, reportedly thought up as a competition between Kleist and three of his friends, fellow poets Ludwig Wieland and Heinrich Zschokke and publisher Heinrich Geßner. Following his visit to Bern in the winter of 1801-1802, Zschokke writes: "Unter zahlreichen, lieben Bekannten, deren Umgang mir den Winter mir verschönte, befanden sich zwei junge Männer meines Alters, denen ich mich am liebsten hingab. Sie atmeten fast einzig für die Kunst des Schönen, für Poesie, Literatur und schriftstellerische Glorie. Der eine von ihnen, Ludwig Wieland, Sohn des Dichters, gefiel mir durch Humor und sarkastischen Witz, den ein Mienenspiel begleitete, welches auch Milzsüchtige zum Lachen getrieben hätte. Verwandter fühlt' ich mich dem andern, wegen seines gemütlichen, zuweilen schwärmerischen, träumerischen Wesens, worin sich immerdar der reinste Seelenadel offenbarte. Es war Heinrich von Kleist. […] Wir vereinten uns auch, wie Virgils Hirten, zum poetischen Wettkampf. In meinem Zimmer hing ein französischer Kupferstich »la cruche cassée.« In den Figuren desselben glaubten wir ein trauriges Liebespärchen, eine keifende Mutter mit einem zerbrochenen Majolika-Kruge, und einen großnasigen Richter zu erkennen. Für Wieland sollte dies Aufgabe zu einer Satire, für Kleist zu einem Lustspiele, für mich zu einer Erzählung werden. – Kleists "zerbrochner Krug" hat den Preis davon getragen" (236ff).

opens with a quote from Ernst Ribbat indicating the uninterpretability of the play.[68] After all, Kleist himself even offers us two endings to the play. One of them (the original) is decidedly longer and Kleist included it as a "Variant" when the play was printed in 1811.[69] But this "impossibility" to interpret the *Krug* in turn offers room for analysis and discussion, which this chapter will occupy. One particularly productive entrée into the play, which this chapter will detail, focuses on irony and its connection to the (broken) body, more specifically, the "bodies of evidence" in this play: Adam and the pitcher, both being fractured are showing numerous signs of injury or damage. While previous research has often discussed the broken pitcher in the context of the young woman Eve, I will adopt a different perspective by positing the jug and the judge together as fractured bodies.

This interpretation finds the pitcher and Adam closely linked even beyond their brokenness, while each is in their own way the reason for the court proceedings, the former as the collateral damage of the assault, the latter as the culprit. Both fracture at the same time – both actions described using a single ambiguous verb – during the very act that is subject and center of the trial. Following my analysis of the treatment of Käthchen's body as a form of physical comedy in the previous chapter, I will also extend this bodily focus to the *Krug*, looking closely at the breakage points of the human body as well as the piece of pottery to investigate their relationship to concepts of irony. What allows us to consider both Adam and the pitcher as bodies? How do they work together in this play? How do they relate to questions of deformation and incongruity? What concept of irony does the text create through the bodies of Adam and the broken pitcher? What does the text seek to challenge with this representation of these bodies and

[68] See Ribbat, p. 133, quoted in Schlossbauer, p. 526: "*Der zerbrochne Krug* ist ein schwieriges Stück. Wer behaupten wollte, einen Interpretationsansatz gefunden zu haben, der alle Elemente des Textes zu einer einheitlichen Bedeutung zusammenfügte, der würde sich – und andere – täuschen."
[69] See also Grathoff, *Kleist*, p. 31.

how does it articulate this challenge? Such inquiries will advance critical understanding of this play beyond established interpretations.

In the last chapter of a recent book on fools in German drama, Joel B. Lande convincingly shows Adam as the central figure of Kleist's *Krug* and focuses on scene 12 – the scene after Adam has been found out and "chased" off stage – to discuss the role of the fool in connection with theatrical performance and textual representation.[70] Lande identifies Adam as the fool, a figure who can interrupt the play through and within the space he inhabits. While Lande then focuses on the "usurpation of the fool's liminal space," his analysis of the role and position is intriguing for the present discussion, as it details the fool's particular territory on stage, "a space – in particular for his speech *ad spectatores* – at the very threshold in between the inside and outside of fiction" (314). With this, the figure is already placed in an "in-between," neither fully inside the scene he is enacting, nor fully outside of it. Bearing Friedrich Schlegel in mind, together with the conclusions from the first chapter, interruptions like this movement inside and outside of the play can be characterized as a form of parabasis and therefore brought into the context of irony. Although the role of the fool itself is not central to this chapter, it is worth nothing the connotation of irony already apparent at the moment of the fool's interruption. Lande also points out Adam's bodily centricity when he notes that "Adam is the sole figure whose body becomes the subject of discourse and, indeed, of dramatic consequence" (309). But while Lande then focuses on how the fool's departure "breaks the formal convention and textual regulation" (312), I want to continue looking at the body itself.

Permeability can be found not only in the space the fool occupies on stage but also in Adam's actual body that is riddled with holes. Kleist already stages Adam's body – or, more

[70] Similarly, Wellbery argues that Adam is "eine spätere Verkörperung des Hanswurst. […] In der Figur des Adams holt [Kleist] den Hanswurst auf die Bühne zurück, aber nur, um seine Expulsion dramatisch zu wiederholen" ("*Der zerbrochne Krug*," p. 23).

specifically, the injuries – as the center of the discussion in the beginning of the play. *Der zerbrochne Krug* opens with Adam bandaging his leg onstage, when his clerk and deputy Licht enters, as given in the stage directions to the first scene:

> Licht. Ei, was zum Henker, sagt, Gevatter Adam!
> Was ist mit Euch geschehn? *Wie seht Ihr aus?* (*ZK* 1, lines 1-2, my emphasis)

From the moment Adam is introduced through Licht, it is clear that there is something unusual about his appearance, his body. The first scene begins with the stage direction, "Adam sitzt und verbindet sich ein Bein" (*SW* 1: 177). Although we don't know anything about the injury yet, the judge's actions indicate that he is suffering from a wound. Licht's lines follow, emphasizing the focus on the body and its disfigurement: "Was ist mit Euch gesehen? Wie seht ihr aus?" It is here, in the first lines of the play that Licht already lets us know: something is terribly wrong with Adam's body.

He continues to interrogate Adam, foreshadowing the trial that will be led by the guilty judge as the play progresses. Within the first forty lines, Licht speaks eighteen times and, of those eighteen lines, fifteen are his questions. While some are specifying previous questions, all pertain to Adam's injuries and seek to advance the conversation:

> Licht. Wann trug sich die Begebenheit denn zu? (*ZK* 1, line 16);
> Und wohl den linken? […] Hier, den gesetzten? (1, lines 21 and 23);
> Und was hat das Gesicht Euch so verrenkt? (1, line 31)

Licht is acting here as an investigating judge, evaluating and judging Adam's actions, concluding his interrogation by ambiguously equating his fall with the Fall of Adam in Genesis, and ultimately pronouncing him guilty: "Der erste Adamsfall, [d]en Ihr aus dem Bett heraus getan" (*ZK* 1, lines 64ff).

Upon further investigation of the wounds that are mentioned in these first lines of the play, a particular focus on Adam's facial injuries emerges:

> Licht. Und was hat das Gesicht Euch so verrenkt?
> Adam. Mir das Gesicht?
> Licht. Wie? Davon wißt Ihr nichts?
> Adam. Ich müßt ein Lügner sein - wie siehts denn aus?
> Licht. Wies aussieht?
> Adam. Ja, Gevatterchen.
> Licht. Abscheulich!
> Adam. Erklärt Euch deutlicher.
> Licht. Geschunden ists,
> Ein Greul zu sehn. Ein Stück fehlt von der Wange,
> Wie groß? Nicht ohne Waage kann ichs schätzen. (*ZK* 1, lines 31ff)

The description of Adam's face here is gruesome. By Licht's account, Adam is missing a piece of cheek so large that he cannot guess its size "without a scale" ("nicht ohne Waage").

Even more surprising is it therefore that Adam hadn't even noticed any injury to his face: "Mir das Gesicht?" "Wie? Davon wißt Ihr nichts?" Assuming that a sizeable portion of his face is missing, it is safe to conclude that he would be in pain and full awareness. Further in the text, we find a similarly clear account of Adam's obliviousness to the severity of his lesions:

> Licht. *bringt einen Spiegel*. Hier! Überzeugt Euch selbst! [...]
> Adam. Hm! Ja! 's ist wahr! Unlieblich sieht es aus.
> Die Nas hat auch gelitten.
> Licht. Und das Auge.
> Adam. Das Auge nicht, Gevatter.
> Licht. Ei, hier liegt Querfeld ein Schlag, blutrünstig, [...]
> Als hätt ein Großknecht wütend ihn geführt.
> Adam. Das ist der Augenknochen. - Ja, nun seht,
> *Das alles hatt ich nicht einmal gespürt.* (*ZK* 1, lines 38ff, my emphasis)

If we believe that Adam "has not felt any of it," then his obliviousness in this situation appears bizarre, advancing his grotesque representation now as a man who is severely injured and defaced yet completely unaware. The incongruity between his injuries and his lack of pain already introduces the notion of irony and adds a comedic charge, also supplied by the conversation with Licht and the mirror that provides Adam with some self-recognition.

Moreover, the gaping hole in his face makes him seem monstrous and surreal, thus already distancing him from the office and position he holds as a judge and even him from his own humanity.

The mirror in this scene opens further consideration into the preoccupation in the play with self-recognition. With Licht bringing the mirror over and putting it in front of Adam, he is not just showing him his wounds, but the clerk is also bringing the guilty party before the judge. This doubling is particularly effective, as it both prefigures Adam as the offender in front of the judiciary (seeing himself in the mirror) as well as making him face and reflect what he already knew about himself (recognizing that he was injured while fleeing from Eve's room). The notion of self-knowledge had already been introduced in the previous dialog with Licht but is visually emphasized – for both Adam and the audience – by the image produced in the mirror. The components of this scene echo the emphasis on self-awareness in the preface to the play, where Kleist draws the connection between his *Krug* and Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*.[71] Aside from the commonality of the court setting, both plays are concerned with guilt, human weaknesses and drives and self-knowledge: both Adam and Oedipus find themselves in the situation of having to pass judgement on themselves. The fundamental difference is that Oedipus is initially unaware of his wrongdoing – killing his father and marrying his mother – while Adam, of course, knows that he forced himself on a young woman in exchange for his cancellation of her beloved's military deployment that he had himself invented and is now trying everything to cover it up by pointing fingers. From the very beginning of the play and through both dialogue and visuals on stage, the play draws our attention to questions of self-knowledge and self-judgement, triggered by Adam's body and, specifically, his wounds.

[71] See *SW*, p. 176: "und der Gerichtsschreiber sah (er hatte vielleicht kurz vorher das Mädchen angesehen) jetzt den Richter mißtrauisch zur Seite an, wie Kreon, bei einer ähnlichen Gelegenheit, den Ödip."

With these considerations about the mirror and Licht's confrontation, I argue that the wounds-turned-holes in Adam's body play a more central role in Kleist's play than scholarship has previously recognized. The specifics of the lesions will be examined more closely below but, for now, even a superficial look at the holes in his face can perceive them as disruptions of the body that show an incompleteness on a very physical level. It is through these wounds that an in-between space is embodied: his body, porous and permeable, has created a space that allows for osmotic processes, marked as an organism that is not closed and can't be contained. As will be seen in later analyses, there is a distinct relationship between Adam's body – its openness, its incompleteness, its fluidity – and irony, with its persistent invasiveness and irrepressibility.

We already know that Adam is missing a big piece of cheek and that his nose is damaged, as is his eye, but several other wounds are pointed out. Walter, the judiciary inspector, points out to Adam two more gaping wounds in the front and in the back of his head:

> Walter. [...] Ihr habt zwo Wunden, vorne ein' und hinten. (*ZK* 10, line 1466)

Adam again appears clueless as to where on his body he is injured and struggles to explain how he fell and first hit the front of his head and then the back:

> Adam. Erst so, dann so. Erst auf die Ofenkante,
> Die vorn die Stirn mir einstieß, und sodann
> Vom Ofen rückwärts auf den Boden wieder,
> Wo ich mir noch den Hinterkopf zerschlug. (*ZK* 10, lines 1469ff)

For those following the account of all of Adam's head injuries, it seems hard to imagine which part of his face is not damaged, as more and more holes seem to appear. This proliferation of wounds begins in the first scene, when we learn of the lesion to his face through the dialog between Adam and Licht, and continues as his face and head as a whole are described as more and more disfigured: he goes from missing a piece of his cheek, an injured nose, eye, cheekbone, and a dash in his forehead (*ZK* 1, line 59) to also having two gaping holes in his forehead and in

the back of his head.[72] This leads readers to wonder whether it is not just the individual wound itself that renders the body uncontained but whether the injuries themselves are proliferating, are creating an uncontrolled process of perforation. It seems as if Adam's wounds did not just appear at the moment of injury but are multiplying before the (inner) eyes of the audience. While he is entangling himself deeper and deeper in his lies about the wounds, attempting to steer the trial in any direction that would avert suspicion of his involvement, the judge's injuries also deepen and change. In every sense of the term, he cannot *cover up* the truth and the more he tries, the more open his body becomes. It is therefore in connection with these injuries that I consider the notion of irony a productive aspect for this discussion.

The first chapter of this study has already pointed out the moment of disruption as one of the most principal characteristics of irony as it is relevant to this study. There, I discussed the disruptive force in what Friedrich Schlegel calls "permanent parabasis" together with Paul de Man's thoughts on potential for irony to undo structures of narrative and negate systems of understanding. It is this disruptive quality of irony that I want to utilize in my close readings of Kleist's plays – particularly for the reading of the bodies he puts on stage. While in both Schlegel and de Man, irony was treated and discussed as primarily relating to creative processes, a rhetorical, tropological system (the narrative, a work of art), and knowledge and understanding, I want to consider other ways in which irony can appear and be expressed – namely through a form of physical, bodily irony. I argue that in Kleist, we see an irony that is involved in the play between the literal and material: it exists in the written word but is made visible and brought to life, so to speak, through the very body on stage, an act of realization that oversteps and, to some extent, undoes the boundaries of rhetorical irony. Kleist's irony thus has the potential to surpass the textual and express itself on a physical level. It is turned outward and experienced by the

[72] The entry to "Augenknochen" in the *DWB* refers to it as "Backenknochen" (cheekbone).

audience. Not all of Kleist's bodily irony happens onstage, visible to the audience, however, as some is expressed on a textual level, through the utterances of the characters. This, I believe, is where readers can also identify the Kleistian balancing act between narrative and dramatic that I discussed in my previous chapter. Its subtle play on the threshold of dramatic and narrative also provides the space for Kleist to establish this particular form of irony as it is developed both through the text and the body on stage. We will see another example of this link in my reading of Marthe's extensive ekphrasis of the broken pitcher later in this chapter. Here, however, irony is already at play in the tracing of Adam's wounds as shown above and the identification of these holes as spaces "in-between" that create an openness. The injuries create disruptions in his body, break the body open, but what implications do these wounds have when thinking about the very role that Adam represents as a judge? What is at stake when irony is brought into the discussion, given that Adam embodies the judicial system, on a physical level as well?

When Adam takes his seat on the bench, his professional attire is also missing parts. Although he is wearing a robe, his wig, as a result of his altercation, is missing and therefore exposes not only his baldness but also the wounds on his head. This exposure is crucial, since he is em-bodying the legal system and his very physical appearance is closely linked to his role as a judge. Instead of representing a proper and stable structure of a working legal system, his body is exposing its incohesiveness, revealing itself as defective. The missing wig is key here: as part of the proper judge's vestments and, by being placed on the judge's head, as the top and completion of his official attire. Like the robe, bands, and collar, the wig is mainly worn for ceremonial purposes and the representation of power. For the acting judge to enter the bench without it, then, is a very visible sign of his loss of power. Not only can it be read as a lifted veil – or even curtain – that reveals his injuries to everyone in the courtroom, together with the audience, but it also

marks a hole or break in the vestment, which in turn indicates the rupture between the garment and the figure, a break in the representation of judicial structure.

Already on the surface – that is, the representation of status by Adam's vestment – the judicial structure that is supposedly coherent and consistent proves broken, a mere illusion. Instead of its presence, the physicality of the judge marks the absence of power, as Adam fails to preserve this image. But the holes go deeper than just his attire. It is Adam's body and, more precisely, the wounds and holes that expose the discrepancies in the system that he represents. We have seen irony as the force that undoes structure from within, a threatening "machine" – using the words of de Man (181) – that has the ability to negate systems, and this is what we see on Kleist's stage. This irony is not just represented through the written or spoken word, but a figural irony that is acted out and embodied through the very physical appearance of the figures and characters on stage. Kleist demonstrates a dimension of irony that is not just tropological on a narrative level, but physical, and, qua Adam's role as the judge, it is political. Through Adam's wounds, his body is giving the disruptions of irony a "physical shape."[73] Inflicted during his misconduct, Adam's deep wounds – serving as gaps and interruptions of the body of the judge – show a profound incongruity between his human weakness and guilt on the one hand and, on the other hand, the office and structure of the judicial system he represents. It is only through the reading of these wounds as a form of bodily irony that we can both see and understand this underlying incongruity. Adam's body is not only a body of evidence in the court proceedings that he is both leading and subject to, but it is also the body that evidences the unstable power structure that he is unable to maintain.

The representation of disruption here is overwhelming, spreading beyond his wounds. Following Lande's thoughts on the fool who inhabits the "porous zone" (315), Adam's role is

[73] Some of these injuries can be perceived visibly on stage, others appear in the reader's imagination.

already initially situated in a permeable space, one designated for the disruption of – and fluctuation between – fiction and the reality of the spectators. But his vestment is also fragmentary and shows the gap left by the missing wig while his constant interruptions of the court proceedings further hinder the revelation of truth.[74] The ruptures and interruptions in and around Adam's body and character are staggering and, by reading them as a form of bodily irony, we can understand their disruptive and deeply rooted power, a force that challenges structures from within.[75] While Adam tries to do everything he can to cover up his offences, the disruptive force of irony takes over and he cannot maintain the illusion of a flawless power structure. Adam is not the only body of evidence in this court case, of course. The pitcher, the cause and key piece of evidence for the trial, is the second "body" I would like to discuss in the context of irony.

We first learn about the pitcher itself in scene six, while Marthe is complaining about it being broken as she is waiting for the proceedings to begin with Eve, the farmer Veit Tümpel and Eve's fiancé Ruprecht. The pitcher is brought before the court in the following scene. Its introduction into the trial is oblique, as it is not actually Marthe, the owner and plaintiff, who recognizes and identifies the jug as the object of dispute and subject matter, but Adam. He acknowledges the pitcher as something well known to him, here referring to himself as "the office" ("dem Amte"):

> Walter. Kennt Ihr die Frau?
> Adam. Die wohnt hier um die Ecke, Euer Gnaden,
> Wenn man den Fußsteig durch die Hecken geht;

[74] At the beginning of the proceedings, Adam attempts to use his injuries to excuse himself from his judicial role: "Adam *zu Licht*. [...] Die Wund am Schienbein macht mir Übelkeiten; Führt Ihr die Sach, ich will zu Bette gehn." (*ZK* 7, lines 516ff). He then continues to interrupt and hinder the interrogation in the courtroom: for example, when Ruprecht wants to respond to Marthe's accusation, Adam interrupts him and orders him to be quiet "Schweig, Maulaffe!" (*ZK* 7, line 606), or when Walter asks Eve to appear as a witness, Adam interrupts to request water and offer Walter some wine "He! Lies'-! - Erlaubt! Die Zunge wird sehr trocken mir - Margarete! […] Ein Glas mit Wasser! - […] Kann ich euch gleichfalls-?" (*ZK* 8, lines 1069ff).
[75] See also Rainford, p. 3.

	Witw' eines Kastellans, Hebamme jetzt,
	Sonst eine ehrliche Frau, von gutem Rufe.
Walter.	Wenn Ihr so unterrichtet seid, Herr Richter,
	So sind dergleichen Fragen überflüssig,
	Setzt ihren Namen ins Protokoll,
	Und schreibt dabei: *dem Amte wohlbekannt.*
	[...]
	Fragt nach dem Gegenstand der Klage jetzt.
Adam.	Jetzt soll ich –?
Walter.	Ja, den Gegenstand ermitteln!
Adam.	*Das ist gleichfalls ein Krug*, verzeiht.
Walter.	Wie? Gleichfalls!
Adam.	Ein Krug. Ein bloßer Krug. Setzt einen Krug,
	Und schreibt dabei: *dem Amte wohlbekannt.*
Licht.	Auf meine hingeworfene Vermutung
	Wollt Ihr, Herr Richer –?
Adam.	Mein Seel, wenn ichs Euch sage,
	So schreibt ihrs hin. Ists nicht ein Krug, Frau Marthe?
Frau Marthe.	Ja, hier der Krug –
Adam.	Da habt Ihrs.
Frau Marthe.	Der zerbrochne –. (*ZK* 7, lines 583ff, my emphasis)

The complexity of this scene unfolds as Adam recognizes the pitcher. When he is telling the scribe to include the line "dem Amte wohlbekannt" ("well known to the office"), he admits being familiar with the broken object and brings himself right into the context of the case. But we have just heard the same line ("dem Amte wohlbekannt") in reference to Marthe. Thus, the introduction of the jug mirrors the introduction of the female character. The repetition of this line, referencing both the pitcher and Marthe, brings the woman and the pitcher even closer in context: Adam is intimately familiar with them both.

It is the term "gleichfalls" ("likewise") that Adam chooses, however, that labels them as "equal": "Das ist *gleichfalls* ein Krug" ("that is a pitcher *as well*"). This line explicitly equalizes the woman with a pitcher, introducing a metaphorical understanding of the pitcher as referring to the female body. Additionally, the attribution "das ist *gleichfalls* ein Krug," with the understanding that Adam is referring to both Marthe as a woman and the pitcher, turns the female into a mere object. Even more so, as the adverb "gleichfalls" suggests a substitutability:

"one is like the other," as Andreas Hamburger puts it.[76] It is unsurprising, then, that the understanding of the pitcher as symbolic of – or related to – the female body has been discussed by numerous researchers, especially in the context of its hole or brokenness; after all, by explicitly linking the two, Kleist invites the reader and the audience to make this very connection.[77] But this link may as well be a red herring, especially as research has recognized that an analysis of this play is anything but straightforward. As Schlossbauer writes: the "range of interpretations" for this play are "striking" (526). Why then would we only consider the relation that the text suggests so openly? The present study thus promotes a different, more subtle perspective in its unique interpretative juxtaposition of Adam and the pitcher, placing a strong focus on the *body* of each. But before offering my own approach, I want to follow Kleist's overt suggestion just a bit further, looking more closely at some of the research, establishing an understanding of the pitcher as related to the female body, to then advance my own arguments on bodies more generally.

In his discussion of Kleist's play, Hamburger adopts rather simple terms when he says: "Ein Krug ist, jedenfalls aus der Sicht des auf sein sexuelles Begehren reduzierten Mannes, einfach eine Frau, unter weitgehender Absehung von ihrer Persönlichkeit."[78] But as clear-cut as Hamburger's comparison might be, a closer reading of Kleist's pitcher proves to be more complex. Deeper insight into this interpretation is afforded by a brief digression into the use of the broken pitcher as a visual trope and its adaptation in fine arts as an image of virginity, an

[76] See Hamburger, p. 193: "Die eine ist wie die andere, ich kenne mich damit aus."
[77] See, for example, Wellbery, "*Der zerbrochne Krug*," p. 25: "Wichtig ist vielmehr, daß die ikonographische Bedeutung des Bildmotivs "Krug" auf diese Weise in das Drama eingegangen ist. Kaum übertreibend läßt sich nämlich behaupten, daß jeder gemalte Krug [...] auf die abgerundete Geschlossenheit des weiblichen Körpers verweist, und in den Fällen, wo der gemalte Krug zerspalten oder gebrochen ist, wird der Verlust jungfräulicher Unschuld thematisiert." See also Wild, pp. 467-488.
[78] See Hamburger, p. 193: "At least from the perspective of the man reduced to his sexual desires, a jug is simply a woman, with general disregard of her personality."

inquiry that will advance critical understanding of the origin of the play and its literary adaptation.

Gisela Zick offers a comprehensive view on different representations of the broken pitcher in fine arts from the fifteenth through the early nineteenth century, as well as interpretations and the development of the broken pitcher as a motif. She discusses sketches and artworks portraying the saying "the pitcher will go to the well once too often," an idiomatic expression that had been circulating widely in a variety of European languages from as early as the thirteenth century (Zick 149ff). In the seventeenth century, however, the meaning of the saying, originally relating to the fragility and finitude of life and human existence, shifts and contracts towards the meaning of the loss of virginity.[79] One famous piece of art that has been interpreted in a sexual key is Jean-Baptiste Greuze's painting *La cruche cassée* (Fig. 2).[80] The portrait shows a young woman in a loosened, light-colored dress, holding up her apron to carry pink roses in front of her lower abdomen. Part of her chest and left breast are bare. Over her right arm, a broken pitcher hangs by its handle as she stands in front of a fountain issuing a thin jet of water from the figure of a dark lion with a face resembling a human male. According to an anecdote about Greuze's initial idea for the painting, the broken pitcher was included in the image only to indicate a "previous kiss."[81] While, as Zick points out, the story of the initial idea

[79] See Zick, p. 154: "[Es] wird deutlich, daß sich die Bedeutung des zerbrochenen Kruges vom Symbol menschlichen Lebens, seiner Bedrohtheit und Endgerichtetheit, hier zum Symbol verlorener Unschuld gewandelt und damit verengt hat. [...] Der Drehpunkt in der Bedeutungsgeschichte des Motives, die Wandlung des Kruges vom Vanitassymbol zum corpus delicti, scheint hier, kurz vor der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts, zu liegen."
[80] On permanent display at Musée du Louvre, Paris.
[81] See Zolling, p. 37, which quotes Arsène Houssaye (my emphasis): "Man weiß, wie Greuze auf die Idee seines Sujets kam. [...] Der Fabeldichter Florian erzählte ihm einmal, daß Agnes, seine Magd, jeden Abend zum Brunnen gehe, dort den Krug unter den Wasserstrahl stelle und mittlerweile einen kleinen Abstecher in den Park mache, wo ein junger Holzschnitzer arbeite. 'Sehen Sie,' rief Florian plötzlich, 'dort kommt sie von Brunnen, ganz gedankenvoll und bestürzt.' 'Ja,' sagte Greuze, 'dieser verteufelte Künstler hat sich gewiß zum Dessert einen Kuß genommen.' 'Warum sollten sie nicht?! Sie sind beide jung. Solche Liebe mit siebzehn Jahren ist ein Segen des Himmels.' 'Jetzt hat sie den Krug genommen und kommt mit schmachtender Lässigkeit des Weges daher. Ach, könnte ich sie jetzt malen!' 'Dem Bilde würde etwas fehlen.' 'Ei, was denn?' 'Der Kuß, den sie im Park empfangen und gegeben.' 'Die Malerei weiß sich zu helfen. *Ich kann den Kuß ganz einfach andeuten, indem ich einen*

for the painting was likely invented only after it was completed, this legend underscores the perception of the loss of innocence portrayed in the painting.

Fig. 2: *La cruche cassée* (1772 or 1773) by Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805). © Art Resource.

zerbrochenen Krug male.' 'Vielleicht würden Sie damit zu viel sagen; aber die Idee ist sinnreich. Also frisch ans Werk! Ihr Bild soll "Der zerbrochene Krug" heißen.'" See also Zick, p. 161.

Theophil Zolling goes so far as to interpret Greuze's painting as the true origin of Kleist's *Krug*, despite its nominal ascription to Jean-Jaques Le Veau (39ff). Zolling reads Greuze's half-length portrait of the young woman as the original source of Le Veau's etching, which, according to the preface of the *Krug*, ultimately served as the template for the play.[82] Dorothea von Mücke briefly discusses a similar approach by Hinrich Seeba, who considered Greuze's painting only one of several that inspired Kleist when writing his play, but ultimately argues against this interpretation:

> Seeba's inclusion of Greuze's painting in the series of pictures that might have inspired Kleist's comedy might be misleading. For anything, the picture Kleist describes as the occasion of his comedy must be seen in contrast to Greuze's picture. Whereas in Greuze's painting the broken pitcher metonymically stands for the loss of innocence, in the pictures by Debucourt and Le Veau the pitcher is primarily a damaged physical object, the object of a legal dispute, the concrete point of reference and piece of evidence for the old woman's complaint. (44)

Von Mücke's convincing position aside, the present study does not aim to determine the validity of either of the views concerning Greuze's painting as the origin of *Der zerbrochne Krug*. It is nonetheless worth noting that the motif of the broken pitcher as a symbol of the loss of virginity had been established and given an artistic form decades before Kleist's play was composed and that the motif, already subject to a variety of interpretations continues to engage interpretations of Kleist's play.

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[82] See *SW*, p. 176: "Diesem Lustspiel liegt wahrscheinlich ein historisches Faktum, worüber ich jedoch keine nähere Auskunft habe auffinden können, zum Grunde. Ich nahm die Veranlassung dazu aus einem Kupferstich, den ich vor mehreren Jahren in der Schweiz sah. Man bemerkte darauf - zuerst einen Richter, der gravitätisch auf dem Richterstuhl saß: vor ihm stand eine alte Frau, die einen zerbrochenen Krug hielt, die schien das Unrecht, das ihm widerfahren war, zu demonstrieren: Beklagter, ein junger Bauerkerl, den der Richter, als überwiesen andonnerte, verteidigte sich noch, aber schwach: ein Mädchen, das wahrscheinlich in dieser Sache gezeugt hatte (denn wer weiß, bei welcher Gelegenheit das Deliktum geschehen war) spielte sich, in der Mitte zwischen Mutter und Bräutigam, an der Schürze; wer ein falsches Zeugnis abgelegt hätte, könnte nicht zerknirschter dastehn: und der Gerichtsschreiber sah (er hatte vielleicht kurz vorher das Mädchen angesehen) jetzt den Richter mißtrauisch zur Seite an, wie Kreon, bei einer ähnlichen Gelegenheit, den Ödip. Darunter stand: der zerbrochene Krug. - Das Original war, wenn ich nicht irre, von einem niederländischen Meister." Le Veau's copper etching *Le juge, ou la cruche cassée* (production date 1770-1786) was based on a painting by Louis-Philibert Debucourt (1755-1832). See, for example Spahr et al., p. 412.

Separate from an analysis of the relationship between the pitcher and the female body, I want to point out the very basis of the discussion and focus on the body itself. The fact that the pitcher – the *corpus* of the *corpus delicti* in Kleist's *Krug* – is so closely linked to a discussion of the female body and specifically to the question of the loss of innocence could be one argument to recognize the pitcher as such, as a *body*. But I see an even stronger argument in Marthe's presentation and account of the pitcher. Before she presents the object to the court, she draws a connection between the pitcher and a human body herself when she points out that the pitcher "landed on its leg":

> Frau Marthe. [...] Und dieser irdne Krug, der Krug von Ton,
> *Aufs Bein kam er zu stehen*. (*ZK* 7, lines 704ff, my emphasis)

Ultimately, with *Der zerbrochne Krug* Kleist does adapt for the stage the pitcher from Le Veau's etching *Le juge, ou la cruche cassée* (Fig. 3), which displays a court hearing. The surroundings of the immediate scene are peculiar: the location is not a sophisticated space but, rather, an agrarian multipurpose hall. We see the open room from the side, with the judge behind a table, just left of the center, and a group of people in front of him, among whom are an older woman and an older man. The woman is holding a younger man by his collar while pointing at him and the older man is gesturing towards a young woman. This young woman is situated at the very center of the image, the brightest and most visibly defined part of the etching. With her head and body turned slightly towards the spectator, we can clearly see that she is holding a broken jug over her right arm, resembling some of the features of the young woman in Greuze's painting. Around the men and women immediately involved in the hearing here are several others, walking or standing on the left or in the background towards the entry on the right right.

Through Kleist's adaptation, this template, a static scene from the fine arts, would be interpreted, translated and transformed into a physical shape, a theatrical play on stage.

Fig. 3: *Le Juge, ou la cruche cassée* (1770-1786) by Jean-Jaques LeVeau (1729-1786), after Philbert-Louis Debucourt (1755-1832). © President and Fellows of Harvard College

It is through Marthe, who owns the pitcher, that the audience learns more about its damage, as well as its decorative imagery:

> Frau Marthe. […] Hier grade auf dem Loch, wo jetzo nichts,
> sind die gesamten niederländischen Provinzen
> Dem spanschen Prinzen Philipp übergeben worden.
> Hier im Ornat stand Kaiser Karl der fünfte:
> Von dem seht ihr nur noch die Beine stehn.
> Hier kniete Philipp, und empfing die Krone:
> Der liegt im Topf, bis auf den Hinterteil,
> Und auch noch der hat einen Stoß empfangen.
> Dort wischten seine beiden Muhmen sich,
> Der Franzen und der Ungarn Königinnen,
> Gerührt die Augen aus; wenn man die eine

Die Hand noch mit dem Tuch empor sieht heben,
So ists, als weinete sie über sich.
Hier im Gefolge stützt sich Philibert,
Für den den Stoß der Kaiser aufgefangen,
Noch das Schwert; doch jetzo müsst er fallen,
So gut wie Maximilian: der Schlingel! (*ZK* 7, lines 649ff)

It is productive for the present interpretation of the pitcher to consider its imagery a bit further before returning to its analysis. The scene that Marthe is describing here is the transfer of power over the seventeen Dutch provinces from the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to his son Philip II, king of Spain, in 1555. While there is no contemprary visual account of the ceremony at that time, the scene has been described in later reports and portrayed numerous times in visual arts (56ff). Without rehashing these reports in detail, I want to indicate several elements of the historical circumstances that might help illuminate Marthe's long account and frame my interpretation of the scene and the pitcher.

The transfer of power from Charles V to Philip II itself already marks this event as significant for European history but it also marks the turn towards the independence of the Netherlands (Stiebert 296ff). The Dutch Revolt against Philip II started only thirteen years after he took over the provinces and, eventually, the Dutch Republic was formed. But as Susan Richter, Michael Roth and Gregor Stiebert point out, in itself, Charles's abdication was historically not a natural course of action. To pass on the power to the younger generation was not seen as a natural and responsible step but instead as an interference with God's order. Because it was granted only through divine power, the throne should be kept until the end of the sovereign's life, measured out by God.[83] Interestingly, Martin Schieder suggests the resignation

[83] See Richter, p. 10: "Das Verständnis von der Aufgabe der Macht war in der europäischen Frühen Neuzeit vielmehr von der Perpetuierung eines Pflichtgedankens und einer Würde von Generation zu Generation, die gnadenvoll von Gott auf Lebzeiten übertragen worden war, geprägt. Nicht der Mensch durfte diese Gnade aufkündigen, sondern allein Gott durch die Abberufung durch den Tod. Daran war ein Herrschaftsverständnis geknüpft, das den Monarchen als Menschen in seiner gebrechlichen Körperlichkeit zwang, auch bei Krankheit und im Alter dieser Pflicht nachzukommen und die göttliche Bürde des Amtes zu tragen."

from a throne with the transfer of power other than through the natural course of death and successor as a "Leerstelle," a "blank space" or "gap" in the iconography of emperors.[84] The terminology is intriguing, if we consider the central position of the hole, the "gap" in the pitcher, as it could also be interpreted as a "blankspace" in the very vessel that is displaying the abdication.

Of the extensive research done on the image on the pitcher in Kleist's *Krug*, the works of Hinrich Seeba and Dirk Grathoff prove most relevant for the present purposes. Seeba convincingly argues that the template for the pitcher's imagery was an etching created by Simon Fokke and that Kleist used Jan Wagenaar's *Allgemeine Geschichte der Vereinigten Niederlande* as a narrative source of the ceremony.[85] Particularly convincing is Seeba's quotation of Wagenaar's report of the emperor encouraging the audience's emotional response to the transition of power they were witnessing, as is his characterization of the aesthetic character of the spectacle, stressing its theatrical quality.[86] Beyond the attribution of its sources, it is worth dwelling on the image on the pitcher to fully appreciate the irony that arises with its description given by Marthe. Grathoff points out that the image of Philip taking power over the Dutch provinces is merely the prelude to the actual history.[87]

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[84] Martin Schieder discusses this "gap" in his article "Die Abdankung des Monarchen – eine Leerstelle in der Herrscherikonographie": "Der Grund für diese Fehlstelle liegt auf der Hand: die „abdicatio regni" ist in der Herrscherinszenierung nicht vorgesehen" (294).

[85] See Seeba, p. 436. See also Seeba 432: "kann [Simon Fokke's] Kupferstich […] mit besseren Gründen als Kleists Bildquelle reklamiert werden: Overdragt der Nederlanden door Keizer Karel den V. aan zynen zoon Filips, in't jaar 1555."

[86] See Seeba, p. 433-435: "Ein wirkungsvolles, auf Wirkung berechnetes Schauspiel." In his argument, Seeba heavily relies on John Motley's interpretation: "Motley [hat] das historische Ereignis nicht nur im Bild einer Theaterszene dargestellt, sondern er hat es schon im Hinblick auf seine Rezeption als *Theaterszene inszeniert* gesehen" (434, my emphasis).

[87] See Grathoff, "Der Fall," pp. 296ff: "Die feudale Zeremonie kennzeichnet nichts mehr als den geschichtlichen Status, den diese Staatsgründung im Bezug zur geschichtlichen Zeit der Spielhandlung einnimmt: die Staatsgründung gehört der *Vor*geschichte zu [...] der Eintritt in die Geschichte erfolgt - aus der Perspektive der Spielhandlung gesehen - erst mit dem Freiheitskampf der Niederländer gegen die Spanier."

Following the lengthy description of both what can and cannot be seen on the ceramic, Marthe continues in the same elaborate fashion to tell the history of the pitcher that stayed intact despite numerous precarious instances, until it broke during the incident with Adam:

> Frau Marthe. […] Den Krug erbeutete sich Childerich,
> Der Kesselflicker, als Oranien
> Briel mit den Wassergeusen überrumpelte.
> Ihn hatte ein Spanier, gefüllt mit Wein,
> Just an den Mund gesetzt, als Childerich
> Den Spanier von hinten niederwarf,
> Den Krug ergriff, ihn leert' und weiter ging.
> […]
> Der warf, als die Franzosen plünderten,
> Den Krug, samt allem Hausrat, aus dem Fenster,
> Sprang selbst, und brach den Hals, der Ungeschickte,
> Und dieser irdne Krug, der Krug von Ton,
> Auf Bein kam er zu stehen, und blieb ganz.
> […]
> Darauf in der Feuersbrunst von sechsundsechzig […]
> Nichts ist dem Krug, ich bitt euch sehr, ihr Herren,
> Nichts Anno sechsundsechzig ihm geschehen.
> Ganz blieb der Krug, ganz in der Flammen Mitte. (*ZK* 7, lines 680ff)

From "Childerich" who "overthrew the Spaniard," marking the Dutch Revolt and the earliest independence from Spanish rule, to the pillage of the city of Tienen by French troops in 1635, even through "the fire of '66," the "Holmes Bonfire," the pitcher stays intact.[88]

Grathoff argues that this account of the pitcher's owners and whereabouts through time and history of the Netherlands symbolize the Dutch becoming subjects of their own state:

> erst mit der Befreiung von den Spaniern werden die Niederländer zum gesellschaftlichen Subjekt des Staates. [...] [D]ie Niederländer [sind] - im Status

[88] On August 19, 1666, Robert Holmes, an officer of the Royal Navy, ordered attacks on a Dutch fleet and, the following day, on the town of Terschelling. Under his command, 140 to 170 ships and the town of Westerschelling were destroyed by fire in an attack that not only took lives but also substantially damaged the Dutch economy. See Rommelse, pp. 162ff.

> der Freiheit - zum gesellschaftlichen Subjekt ihres Staates geworden [...], der Krug und seine Inbesitznahme stehen dafür ein.[89]

Grathoff thus reads the breaking of the pitcher as a loss of this subjectivity and a return to a societal position as objects:

> Waren die Niederländer zu Zeiten der Vorgeschichte gesellschaftliches Objekt von Fremdherrschaft und feudalem Gesellschaftszustand, so sind sie nach Befreiung und zum-Subjekt-Werden nunmehr unter modernen Bedingungen wieder zum gesellschaftlichen Objekt geworden, zum Objekt des "eigenen" Staates. [...] an die Stelle von Fremdherrschaft und Feudalzustand ist in der Moderne die Institution des Staates getreten. ("Der Fall," 299)

This return, then, is just a return to a previous state under a different "ruler." After all this, the breaking of the pitcher happens not through a foreign entity but through a person working for the state itself, a public servant. Its destruction and the return to objecthood comes from within the institution of the (independent) state itself (Grathoff, "Der Fall," 298).

In my previous chapter, I have already shown Kleist working in between genres, creating a drama that defies a fixed category of comedy or tragedy. Here, we see not only a translation from Stokke's etching and Wagenaar's account onto the pitcher, but also in Marthe's account of the broken image (to readers and audience), given that readers have no visual image of it and the audience of the play would likely be unable to make out any detail on a pitcher on stage. Thus, Kleist is translating one medium to the other, letting them overlap and interlace – the etching and historical account onto a pitcher, the pitcher that is broken and relies on Frau Marthe's narrative to fill in the invisible gaps. Kleist, moreover, specifies in the preface that the template for the play itself was a copper etching, adding to the act of translation and bridging that is performed –

[89] See Grathoff, "Der Fall," p. 297. Grathoff continues: "Kleists Denken kreist hier nicht universalhistorisch um ein gesellschaftliches Subjekt der Geschichte, sondern, regional und epochal begrenzt, um Geschichte, die erst mit der Erhebung eines gesellschaftlichen Subjekts des Staates beginnt."

in and through – the *Krug* and underscoring the work at the threshold between mediums. Here again, we see another overlapping of stages.[90]

While we have already seen a similarly complex array of theatrical settings in *Käthchen*, in the *Krug* Kleist creates a multidimensional network of stages that stretches between different stages, media and times: the theatrical spectacle of the 1555 abdication of Charles V illustrated on the pitcher; the courtroom with Adam, Walter and Licht acting in their official positions before an audience of several attendees; Marthe's account which makes everyone in the courtroom its audience; and the scene on the *Krug* itself, with us as spectators. But it does not even end with these, as I also consider Kleist's preface, in which he describes the court scene from the late-eighteenth-century copper etching as a representation of a stage, as well as, mediated through the preface, the stage of the court scene in the original etching from Le Veau, an etching, which was translated into copper from a painting of yet another stage. What can one make out of such a vast and convoluted multitude of stages? And what kind of theater is Kleist creating here? It is above all a theater in constant transition. The transition is not just one from stage to stage but also between media, even between the different textures and materials of copper, ceramic, and paper. In this way, Kleist's *Krug* itself shares qualities of the elusive character of irony. We are never just looking at one stage, one material, one medium, but are confronted with a highly complex structure that seems to resist containment.

The body of the text as a whole, furthermore, resists a defined structure. As mentioned above, in the same 1811 publication, Kleist included a second ending to the *Krug* with the "Variant" at the end of the shorter version of the play, an alternative ending that is as open-ended

[90] Seeba similarly points out three "levels of fiction," by focusing on the perspective of the spectators at the crowning of Prince Philip, the perspective of Marthe, and the perspective of the audience, but he focuses on different levels of perspective and the "difficulties of the process of finding historic truth," (p. 430) while I am more interested here in the complexity of Kleist's theater and the different stages and audiences he interlaces.

as the first. With this second ending, one could argue that Kleist creates yet another gap, in that it breaks from the idea of narrative conclusion. Even if we choose one of the alternatives, the play – and the case – will never be "closed." In the end, no matter where we look, the play is riddled with gaps and holes, spaces in between, that repeatedly emphasize incompleteness and a structure that resists rigid boundaries. From this focus on the "in-between" spaces of the text and the play in general, comes a particular quality of the hole we find in the pitcher. Kleist himself made it very clear when he left out the "e" in the title, describing the pitcher not as the standard "zerbroch*e*ne Krug" ("brok*e*n") but as the "zerbrochne Krug" ("brok'n"). Not only is the fragmentation made visible through the meaning of the adjective, but also leaving out the letter in the word itself is creating a hole in the text. With the description of the broken pitcher as fragmented, it can be interpreted as yet another translation (from broken artifact to broken text), which once again underscores the emphasis on the site of fragmentation, or gap, that has been at the center of my reading of this play.

I have already shown that Adam's wounds take center stage from the very beginning of the play and have interpreted the holes and gaps in his body with the concept of irony. But after seeing the way in which Kleist stages the fractures of both Adam and the pitcher as they are, it is all the more surprising that scholarship on this drama has insisted on the connection between the pitcher and Eve.[91] While this connection is suggested on the surface level of the text, as this study shows, there is a deep connection between Adam and the pitcher. These considerations on the irony of Kleist's polyvalent translation can inform a further reading of the pitcher: following Grathoff's argument, Marthe can be seen as not just telling the tale of a pitcher but also giving a highly politicized account of becoming "subjects" of their own state before being thrown back into the former position of objecthood due to an attack from within the system. Reading this in

[91] See, for example, Wellbery, "*Der zerbrochne Krug*"; and Hamburger.

connection with my previous thoughts on irony, I see a destructive and disruptive force in the political system similar to what I have already observed regarding Adam's wounds. Leaning on de Man's terminology again, I argue that there is irony's "machine" at work in the politics of this play, the machine that undoes structures and threatens to negate them from within, a force that ruptures the very system to which it belongs. With irony as the underlying force, I have read Adam's wounds as marking an unstable power structure. His weakness shows a deep incongruity with the standards to which he is held, an incompatability that, after the incident, manifests in his wounds.

It is Adam himself who recognizes and verbalizes this disparity in the beginning of the play:

> Adam. [...] Es ist kein Grund, warum ein Richter,
> Wenn er nicht auf dem Richtstuhl sitzt,
> Soll gravitätisch wie ein Eisbär sein. (*ZK* 1, lines 157ff)

Just because he is holding the office, does not mean he is not human anymore. He is the *acting* judge while his drives and human weakness remain the same. Being in court himself, as judge and guilty party, he cannot maintain the power structure he himself represents.

With the pitcher, we see a similar "weakness," for it becomes fragile in the precise moment that Adam misuses his office, after being stable and whole through all the events that Marthe narrates:

> Eve. Wo die Perück hängt, die er noch vergaß.
> Und greift und reißt vom Kruge sie, und reißt
> Vom Gesims den Krug herab:
> Der stürzt; *er springt*; und Ruprecht kracht ins Zimmer. (*ZK* Variant, lines 2235ff)

The text mentions that Adam "forgot" his wig (*ZK* Variant, lines 2235) and, by reading the wig as a symbol for the position he holds, I interpret the forgetting of the wig as Adam losing

consciousness of the standards to which he is held and following his human drives at the beginning of the fall.

What follows, in fact, is an overlap of Adam's weakness and the pitcher's fragility. In the text, the simultaneity of this overlap is represented through the double meaning of "springt" (which can mean both "jumps" and "cracks") and the singular masculine pronoun "er," which can refer to Adam or the pitcher (Pahl, *Sex Changes* 59). The clause could then be read as "Adam jumps," "the pitcher cracks," or even "Adam cracks." Either way, their fall and breaking has become one action, as it cannot be clearly said whether it is the pitcher or Adam that is falling or jumping, and at this moment they are both bodies of the unstable power structure they represent. With this in mind, I argue that Kleist develops and utilizes a particular form of irony at work between text and stage that is explicitly focused on and performed through the body. Similar to what my previous chapter argued about the comic, Kleist's irony here goes beyond notions of rhetoric but is given a physical shape, manifested in the body as wounds and cracks and utilized as a theatrical means. It is made visible and experienceable and is made a tool to visualize and criticize political and societal incongruities, here, Adam's weakness and the jug's fragility.

De Man writes that "Trope means to "turn," and it's that turning away, that deviation between literal and figural, […] which is certainly involved in all traditional definitions of irony" (165). In a way, Kleist is taking the "figural" literally, by using the figure, the body, to create this kind of irony. But it gets slightly more complicated when taking into account the Kleistian balancing act between dramatic and narrative discussed above. Not everything relating to this kind of physical irony is visible on stage or is even performable. The sensation that Adam's wounds proliferate, for example, would be rather difficult to achieve on stage, showing once again, that the performance of the body and the narration of the text are closely connected to then

create the "whole picture" both in front of the eyes of the audience, as well as in front of their inner eyes.

Adam's wounds are not alone in their challenge to the stage posed by their representation in the text, as the broken pitcher is similarly problematic for an onstage display, for both the detailed image on what is left on it as well as the inconsistent accounts of its integrity. There are several contradicting references regarding its brokenness, described as shattered into pieces and at the same time said to be set down with a mere hole in it:

> Frau Marthe. […] Seht ihr den Krug?
> Adam. Oh ja, wir sehen ihn.
> Frau Marthe. Nichts sehr ihr, mit Verlaub, die *Scherben* seht ihr;
> Der Krüge schönster ist *entzwei geschlagen*.
> Hier grade auf dem *Loch* [...] (*ZK* 7, lines 646ff, my emphasis);
>
> Frau Marthe. [...] bevor der Krug *zertrümmert* worden (9, line 1334, my emphasis)

Through these contradictory accounts of the pitcher's state, it is both described as nothing but shards and also maintaining the shape of a jug. The paradox of a pitcher that is both broken and whole and the impossibility of maintaining both states of being at the same time also translate into questions of performability, as it would be challenging to bring the different degrees of the pitcher's damage onto stage.

Focusing on the paradox of this pitcher, I want to return to Marthe's witness report in front of the court, remarkable not only because for its lengthy and detailed description of the pitcher's ornamental decoration and history but also because it depicts what would be visible if the pitcher was intact. This description of what could once be seen or what was once there goes so far that, as I argue below, Marthe's treatment of the images makes it difficult to determine when she is referencing an image that is visible and when she is giving an account of what is invisible. The picture she is drawing in her narrative account thus closes the gaps of the broken

pitcher and deceives us into perceiving it as a whole. Her account is, for lack of a suitable translation, "ein Hinweg-täuschen *über* die Bruchstellen": it is covering the holes. In this respect, I disagree with von Mücke's article, which proposes that "Marthe's description of the visual scenes participates in the fragmentation of the picture" (46). I argue that Marthe's close juxtaposition of the pictures still visible on the broken pitcher and those replaced by holes instead blurs the lines between what is still there and what is gone. Marthe's narrative of the pitcher's imagery, furthermore, itself stretches over nearly thirty lines of uninterrupted description, as if, line after line, she is connecting the broken pieces of what can and cannot be seen, weaving a closely knit and incredibly densely filled picture of events that form a tapestry of Dutch history.

One of von Mücke's arguments for Marthe's contribution to the fragmentation is her use of the adverb "hier."[92] I argue, however, that the constant repetition of "hier" does quite the opposite. With the words *hier* and *jetzt* (or *jetzo*) providing temporal and spatial deixis, Marthe is showing both what can be seen and what is invisible. The particles emphasize the "covering of the holes" mentioned above, as she is equally pointing to the remaining images on the shards as well as the holes as if they were right in front of the audience's eyes. Therefore, it is through the use of *hier* and *jetzt* that the lines between what is merely Marthe's account and what can still be seen on what is left of the pitcher become indistinct:

Frau Marthe. […] *Hier* […], wo *jetzo* nichts, […]
Hier im Ornat […]
Hier kniete Philipp […]
Dort wischten seine beiden Muhmen […]
Hier im Gefolge […]
[…]
Hier standen […]

[92] See von Mücke, pp. 45ff: "In her effort to describe the two sights, the formerly whole picture versus the shards, Marthe makes use of many deictic particles, the "here" and "now," which chop up rather than piece together coherent wholes."

Hier Häuser, seht. (*ZK* 7, lines 649ff)

While Marthe acknowledges at the beginning that she is referring to the missing piece of the pitcher, something that can no longer be seen ("Hier grade auf dem Loch, wo jetzo nichts"), she nonetheless continues to refer to the missing imagery in the same way as she does to what is visible. Marthe's repetitive use of *hier* and *jetzt* to point out what can and cannot be seen makes it increasingly difficult to determine whether (or how much of) the scene she is describing can still be seen on the pitcher. She is thus closing the gaps of the image rather than facilitating a fragmentation, bringing together two contradicting sides: the pitcher is whole and broken at the same time.

Irony is again helpful for this discussion. I find Schlegel's irony most conducive at this point, namely *Lyceum* fragments 108 and 48, where he writes that in Socratic irony

> everything should be playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden. […] It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication.[93]

One of the aspects Schlegel emphasizes in this fragment is the ability of irony to maintain counteractive forces and complete opposites. *Lyceum* 48 expresses this ability in an even more condensed way, as it describes irony as the "form of the paradox." It is in irony that two opposing forces can be sustained and it is there where a continuous equilibrium of two counterparts can – and should – exist. What makes the consideration of Schlegel's irony so valuable when reading the text and, more importantly, when seeing the pitcher on stage, is that it helps us gain a deeper understanding of the general emphasis on Kleist's stage on brokenness and, in particular, on the breaking of bodies and the sites of fractures (*Bruchstellen*). It is through

[93] See Firchow, p. 155; and *Lyceum* 108 in *KFSA* 2: 160: "soll alles Scherz und alles Ernst sein, alles treuherzig offen, und alles tief verstellt. Sie enthält und erregt ein Gefühl von dem unauflöslichen Widerstreit des Unbedingten und des Bedingten, der Unmöglichkeit und Notwendigkeit einer vollständigen Mitteilung."

the breaking of the bodies that our attention is drawn to the points of breakage, the potential of the forces that are at play and the unexpected results that can emerge in that very space in between. Marthe's presentation of the pitcher is not only a long and dense account of a historic scene but also an example of two opposites that can exist at the same time while being mutually exclusive: the pitcher that is simultaneously broken and whole. With this, Kleist brings onstage the structure of a paradox which takes shape in the pitcher. It is an example of a "performed paradox," so to speak, and a form of Kleist's *physical irony*. He not only expresses irony through the written or spoken word but also finds inventive ways to bring it onstage for the audience to see and experience.

Before concluding the discussion of Adam and the pitcher as ironic bodies, I want to briefly consider the notion of the endlessness of irony in connection with Marthe's description of the pitcher. Through the paradox of the pitcher being both whole and broken, the pitcher's structure as a whole is undecided and in a permanent in-between. As was mentioned in chapter one, Schlegel's understanding of irony is closely linked to the notion of the infinite, whether it is in connection with a "permanent parabasis," the "infinite power" (*Lyceum* fragment 37) at play when creating an ironic work of art, or irony as the "eternal agility […] of an infinitely teeming chaos," irony and infinity are closely related.[94] As Georgia Albert puts it,

> Irony "means" infinity by representing it; more precisely, and anticipating somewhat: by reproducing its structure. (828)

Following this understanding of irony with respect to the pitcher, I read the notion of infinity as relating to the above discussion of the imagery. Building on Grathoff's argument that the hole in the pitcher refers to the loss of subjecthood and a return to a previously held objecthood, I

[94] See *Lyceum* 37 in *KFSA* 2: 151; and *Ideas* 69 in *KFSA* 2: 263. The translation is Firchow's, quoted in Wheeler, page 56. See also *KFSA* 2: 263: "Ironie ist klares Bewußtsein der ewigen Agilität, des unendlich vollen Chaos"; and *KFSA* 18: 85: "Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbase."

interpret the employment of irony here also as a means to critique this return and expose it as an ever-returning phenomenon. Relating it to imagery of the infinite, it is a cycle that repeats itself. It is, moreover, a critique of a dysfunctional power structure of the state. At its core lie deep incongruities between human weakness and the offices to be upheld, between the illusion of a functioning power structure and its functional absence, the idea of a system and its reality.

For the audience and readers of the play, Marthe's account visualizes the contribution she makes to uphold the image of the pitcher as a whole and, with it, the image of a functioning power structure. Through her covering up the cracks and holes of the broken pitcher, she is also playing her part in maintaining the illusion of power. In a way, Marthe's account mirrors Adam's attempt to cover up the illusion of power through interruptions and deflections, in that she is maintaining the image of the pitcher in one piece while also covering up the power structure that broke with it. To the audience and readers, then, Marthe offers us a mirror in her extended treatment of the pitcher, making us recognize our own flawed contribution to upholding a broken power structure. Directed to the courtroom audience and beyond, Kleist again exploits a plurality of theatrical stages. Such a simultaneous orientation is central to Kleist's brand of irony, which this dissertation locates in the constructions of bodies both in the *Krug* and beyond.

4 Torn Apart: Ambivalent Bodies in *Penthesilea*

Injured and Ironic

Having discussed the comedy *Der zerbrochne Krug* in the previous chapter, the following pages will examine ironic and comic elements in one of Kleist's tragedies, *Penthesilea*. While it seems contradictory to include a tragic drama in a study on physical comedy and irony, I propose that there are distinct and central aspects of the play that are linked to bodily representation and evoke a comic effect.

This chapter will thus consist of two parts: I begin my reading of the play in this first section by examining the link between representations of the body and irony while, in the second part, I will discuss its link to comic effects. For both parts, I will focus on the two protagonists, the Amazon queen Penthesilea and the Greek warrior Achilles. Of the questions I am seeking to address, the most pressing concern the ways in which their bodies are represented in this play. How are they fragmented and what role does this fragmentation play in relation to concepts of irony? What role does the Amazon state play in the drama and how can it be interpreted as a "body of the state"? How can a tragedy, especially one as gruesome as *Penthesilea*, evoke a comic effect and how is this effect linked to the broken body?

After its first publication in 1808, almost 70 years passed until *Penthesilea* was first performed on stage. The plot is rather complex, especially given its adaptation of a classical topic. My analysis will only concern isolated excerpts from the text but, for the purpose of comprehensibility, I will begin my reading with a brief overview of the plot. With *Penthesilea*, Kleist took up one of the most discussed events in Greek mythology, the Trojan War. In Kleist's

play, we are transported back to the gates of Troy, where the Greeks have taken up position to seize the city from the Trojans. The reason for this siege, in both Kleist's work and other narratives of the war, is the prior abduction of Helena (*P* 1, line 137). In the first scene of *Penthesilea* we witness the Greek kings Odysseus, Diomedes and Antilochus gathering in front of the city where their troops have been battling. The female warriors, led by their queen, Penthesilea, have been fighting both the Greeks and the Trojans, while their surprised opponents are trying to understand the reason for their attack. Odysseus even considers combining forces with their current enemy, the Trojans, to defeat the Amazons (*P* 1, lines 133ff). While Odysseus, Diomedes, and Antilochus are still attempting to comprehend why the Amazons are attacking and how to handle the situation, a messenger brings them news of the capture of Achilles, their greatest warrior and asset.[95]

But already in the next scene Achilles escapes and is welcomed and celebrated by the kings and the Greek army upon his return. While the crowd around him is admiring and praising his superior skills and his adept escape, the warrior seems absent: he barely notices his wounds and is more concerned with the whereabouts of the Amazon queen. While Odysseus and the other leaders are still wondering what it is that Penthesilea desires, Achilles declares that he knows it is *him*:

> Achilles. [...] Was *mir* die Göttliche begehrt, das weiß ich:
> Brautwerber schickt sie mir, gefiederte. (*P* 4, lines 590ff)

The term "Brautwerber" ("love's messengers") for the arrows that Penthesilea is shooting at him, is one of several metaphors in the drama that play with terminology linking love to violence and

[95] Seán Allan argues that Achilles is not only the greatest Greek warrior but is also an idealized figure. He further discusses the role of the "hero" Achilles, arguing that his "reputation as an invincible champion" is "called into question" in Kleist's play; see Allan, pp. 141ff, especially 147ff.

war.[96] We see this link also in the daggers that "kiss" the breasts of the Amazon's historical oppressors (*P* 15, line 1946) or the "embrace with iron" (*P* 5, line 859). Throughout the play are continuous close connections between love and warfare – two notions that, as Grathoff writes, "exclude and oppose each other" (*Kleist* 126) – in a dynamic best reflected through the romantic and violent relationship of the two protagonists.

While Achilles sets out to conquer her as a new love interest, the Amazon queen is being celebrated as the victress. Mirroring the scene of the Greek warriors and leaders gathered around Achilles, the Amazons surround their queen and praise her combative dominance. But, again like Achilles, Penthesilea does not share her comrades' excitement. She wants to set out and win over Achilles, pursue and conquer him in battle.[97] The queen goes back to defeat Achilles and, as the two are attacking each other with their lances on the battlefield, she gets injured (*P* 8, lines 1125ff). He jumps off his horse and carries her back to the Amazons. While the women around her urge her to flee, Penthesilea is furious and insists on conquering the Greek warrior but then loses consciousness. Before she reawakes, Prothoe, the Amazon with whom Penthesilea shares the closest relationship, convinces Achilles, who admits his love for their queen, to pretend that he is actually the queen's captive. She requests that he not mention he defeated her in order to spare her the pain of waking up to realize she is a prisoner.

Initially, the plan works out and Penthesilea and Achilles have a lengthy conversation in which she reveals to him not only the history of the Amazon state but also her mother's prediction of her defeating the Greek warrior. But the Greeks soon surround and attack the

[96] See also Grathoff, "Der Fall," pp. 126ff: "Krieg und Liebe, Gewalt und Zärtlichkeit sind im Normalitätsverständnis der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft einander ausschließende, entgegengesetzte Bereiche. […] Nicht so in Kleists Trauerspiel. Liebe und Gewalt sind hier sprachlich ununterscheindbar ineinandergefügt." Bettine Menke stresses this connection also anchored in the Amazon law: "[Das Amazonengesetz] verlangt, daß Gewalt als Metapher für Begehren steht. Demnach gilt, in Penthesileas Worten, daß 'ich […] mich kämpfend muß bewerben'" (121ff).

[97] I am using the term "love" loosely here, as there is numerous commentary and research on the different notions of love in Kleist's *Penthesilea*. See, for example, Cullen and von Mücke.

Amazons, revealing the pretense. Achilles and Penthesilea get separated as the Amazons are freeing their leader and, shortly thereafter, he asks her for yet another encounter on the battlefield, a "fight to the death":

> So fordert er [Achilles] dich [Penthesilea] zum Kampf, auf Tod und Leben. (*P* 20, line 2362)

While Achilles prepares to not fight back, letting Penthesilea win and take him to Themiscyra, home of the Amazons, she gathers dogs and elephants to meet him with brute force. She is angry that he called her into battle after seeing her weak and assumes that he is planning to defeat her (*P* 20, lines 2384ff). In this final battle then, she attacks and kills him viciously, as she herself joins her dogs and bites him to death. As we learn in the following scene, Penthesilea is initially unaware of what she did, once she learns he is not only dead, but that it was also her who killed him, she decides to follow his path and kills herself.

Even without a focus on the body, the play *Penthesilea* in its entirety can already be interpreted as an ironized version of the classical myth. In "The Form of Kleist's *Penthesilea* and the *Iliad*," a side-by-side comparison of the *Iliad* and Kleist's *Penthesilea*, Linda Hoff-Purviance observes:

> the basic plot outline of the drama and its twenty-four[-]scene framework bear […] many striking congruences with highlights of the Homeric poem and its twenty-four[-]book form. (44)

Numerous similarities link Kleist's play and Homer's epic, in both their plot and their structure of twenty-four component books or scenes, as is evident in Hoff-Purviance's detailed juxtaposition of Homer's epic and Kleist's play. She concludes that, while some signs do point convincingly to his having based his drama on the epic, Kleist does not adapt unproblematically the "order represented by the epic" but instead "introduces an atmosphere of confusion, disharmony, and obscurity" (Hoff-Purviance 46).

The outcome of Kleist's *Penthesilea* for example differs dramatically: unlike in Homer's *Iliad*, it is not Achilles who kills Penthesilea but the female protagonist kills the male, before committing suicide herself. The ending is not only turned on its head, by switching the roles of victim and perpetrator, but also exaggerated. In the proem to the *Iliad*, moreover, it is said that those who die at Achilles's hands become prey for dogs:

> The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles, the accursed wrath which […] made the men themselves to be the spoil for dogs (Homer, *Iliad* 13).

The Amazons watching Penthesilea's and Achilles's final battle offstage in Kleist's drama not only describe the Amazon queen as a dog but also report her engaging in exactly what Achilles is said to be doing in the *Iliad*: she is turning him into prey as she is biting and killing him:

> Eine Amazone. Meinst du die Königin?
> Die Oberpriesterin. Die Hündin mein ich! (*P* 22, lines 2554ff);
>
> Meroe. Gleich einer Hündin, Hunden beigesellt,
> Der greift die Brust ihm, dieser greift den Nacken, […]
> Sie schlägt, die Rüstung ihm vom Leibe reißend,
> Den Zahn schlägt sie in seiner weiße Brust (23, lines 2659ff)

Thus, this reversal of the victim and aggressor already introduces irony, as it makes Kleist's play an ironic adaptation of the mythological material: the predator becomes prey.

But Kleist does not simply switch the roles of Achilles and Penthesilea, with the Amazon queen also killing herself in the end, the play intensifies its ironic take of the myth through exaggeration. Both Achilles and Penthesilea die through her hand and their story ends not with one but with two dead bodies. Following this, I argue that, already from the beginning – the literal beginning, if we think of the first lines of Homer's *Iliad* – and straight through the ending, where Kleist offers his own ironic conclusion, irony is involved when reading and interpreting Kleist's play. Furthermore, both Achilles's death and Penthesilea's suicide are very "physical"

deaths, with a strong focus on the body. The Greek warrior is bitten and torn to death but, rather than using an object that would serve as a weapon, the Amazon queen uses her own teeth. This not only makes the killing particularly brutal but also introduces a direct and immediate physicality. Penthesilea is using nothing but her own body to kill him.

For her suicide, this focus on the body remains and becomes even more concentrated, in that only one body, hers, is involved. This body does not use any external weapon to kill itself either. There is no "foreign object" that she utilizes here, only the figurative "dagger" she produces from within herself, out of her own body, to then commit suicide:

> Penthesilea. Denn jetzt steig ich in meinen Busen nieder,
> Gleich einem Schacht, und grabe, kalt wie Erz,
> Mir ein vernichtendes Gefühl hervor.
> Dies Erz, dies läutr' ich in der Glut des Jammers
> Hart mir zu Stahl; tränk es mit Gift sodann,
> Heißätzendem, der Reue, durch und durch;
> Trag es der Hoffnung ewgem Amboß zu,
> Und schärf und spitz es mir zu einem Dolch;
> Und diesem Dolch jetzt reich ich meine Brust:
> So! So! So! So! Und wieder! - Nun ists gut.
> *(Sie fällt und stirbt)*. (*P* 24, lines 3025ff)

This particular passage has been addressed in various studies discussing the materialization of language.[98] I would like to focus instead on Penthesilea's death, showing the emphasis on her body. Her "stepping down into her breast," is, to use a German expression, an "In-sich-gehen," a "turning into herself." She then brings forth the "destructive feeling," which is sharpened like a "dagger" and used to take her life. It is, in a way, the ultimate suicide, *Selbst*-mord, in which she is not only putting herself to death but also producing the weapon out of herself. While one can argue that every death is physical, both Achilles's and Penthesilea's death are exceedingly focused on their bodies. The only cause or instrument of their respective deaths is the

[98] See, for example, Jacobs; and Graham.

employment of the body. Especially in Penthesilea's death, there is no object foreign to her own body introduced to the scene, making it the only entity involved in her suicide.

By bearing in mind the irony introduced through Kleist's adaptation of the classical material, switching and multiplying the deaths, and by reading this ironic take on the myth in connection with the focus on the bodies *within* these scenes of killing, one could already draw a robust connection between body and irony. But I would like to look more closely at the bodies themselves, especially their fractures and injuries, and consider the ways in which they represent and, indeed, em-body a form of irony.

The Amazons in Kleist's play, as in Greek mythology, are female warriors.[99] On several occasions, we learn about their history, their social organization of their state (Amazonenstaat), and their bodies. Originating from the tribe of Scynthians, the Amazons form their nation after the Ethiopian king Vexoris invaded their land and killed their husbands. Tanaïs, the first queen of the Amazons, was to be wedded to Vexoris, whose men "tore the women off their husbands' graves into their own beds" (*P* 15, line 1930), when on the wedding day the women attacked and killed their oppressors. To prepare for this, as Penthesilea tells Achilles, the women met secretly at night and melted and shaped their jewelry into weapons. Eventually, the invadors were killed and their "breasts" were "kissed" (*P* 15, line 1946: "Der Gäste Brust zusamt damit zu küssen") with the pointed weapons. As already mentioned above, here again we see the play with words related to death and sexuality. Later, it is Penthesilea who makes the famous "mistake" ("Versehen") when she rips Achilles apart instead of kissing him:

> Penthesilea: – So war es ein Versehen. Küsse, Bisse,
> Das reimt sich, und wer recht von Herzen liebt,
> Kann schon das Eine für das Andre greifen. (*P* 24, lines 2981ff)

[99] Interestingly, the Washington Post published an article in December 2019 about recent discoveries that suggest that the Amazons were not only mythological creatures but also that they actually once existed; see Hawkins.

This tendency to play with the two opposites, *eros* and *thanatos*, is ever present throughout the drama.

The Amazons would found their state only after they successfully overcame the invaders and Tanaïs was chosen to be their queen. Right before her crowning, Penthesilea recounts, they were warned that they would be subject to mockery by men, because their breasts would be hindering their ability to use bow and arrow:

> Penthesilea. [...] Den Spott der Männer werd' er reizen nur,
> Ein Staat, wie der, und gleich dem ersten Anfall
> Des kriegerischen Nachbarvolks erliegen:
> Weil doch die Kraft des Bogens nimmermehr,
> Von schwachen Frau'n beengt durch volle Brüste,
> Leicht, wie von Männern, sich regieren würde. (*P* 15, lines 1977ff)

It is in this scene that we learn about the origin of the Amazons' missing breasts: Tanaïs responds to the warning by removing her own right breast and, for generations to follow, other Amazons would do the same. While the fragmentation of the female body articulated by this mastectomy has been discussed in scholarship, to my knowledge, the link between irony and the mutilation of the Amazon body has not yet been considered.[100] I want to look at one of the studies on the amputated breast, especially in relation to the bow, before I build on the existing scholarship to present my own findings.

In his work on considerations of the breast in German literature and culture in the second half of the eighteenth century, Simon Richter notes that the German word for breast (*Busen*) and bow (*Bogen*) are not only etymologically linked through the same root but they are also visibly similar in shape (231). In the scene that Penthesilea describes, the bow that the high priestess was holding falls to the ground right after Tanaïs has removed her breast and is crowned first Amazon queen, giving Richter to argue that the mastectomy and the falling of the bow "are

[100] See, for example, Simon Richter's chapter "The Breast in Ruins," pp. 216-247 in his book *Missing the Breast*; and Schindler.

moments of simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment" (Simon Richter 232). Richter further writes:

> It is, in any event, this bow that each subsequent queen of the Amazons will wield in battle, a metonymy for the bad breast, the phallic breast, the breast that refuses to nourish, *that attacks and threatens the masculine order.* (232)

Advancing Richter's argument, I want to focus on the close connection between, on one hand, the fragmentation of the female body in the act of the founding of the state and, on the other hand, the threat to the masculine order. With the mastectomy and the founding of the state happening at the same time, the body of the Amazon(s) and the body of the state become closely connected. As we learn from Penthesilea, Tanaïs simultaneously cuts off her breast and baptizes the new nation of Amazons:

> Penthesilea. Riß sie die rechte Brust sich ab, und taufte
> Die Frauen, die den Bogen spannen würden,
> Und fiel zusammen, eh sie noch vollended:
> Die Amazonen oder Busenlosen! -
> Hierauf ward ihr die Krone aufgesetzt. (*P* 15, lines 1986ff)

The acts of fragmentation, baptizing ("tauf[en]"), and crowning go hand in hand with each other and are connecting both "bodies" (the Amazon body and the body of state).

Richter focuses mostly on the notion of the breast, situating the "breast's challenge to the phallic regime" in the wound, which he associates with the "move from being the breast to having the breast" (Simon Richter 247). My reading will instead center the physical wound that is sustained, the place where the breast once was. I argue that this fracture itself is also threatening, for it is where space is opened for a new order (Simon Richter 232ff). The tearing off, the rupture, is the condition that allows for the completion of the founding of the state, a paradoxical structure, considering that an *open* wound is *sealing* the completion of the founding of a new state. The cutting off of the breast is thus the prerequisite, the initiation, to the crowning of their first queen. With the baptism of the women taking place in the same moment as the

tearing off of the breast, Tanaïs is admitting them to the new nation, naming them as Amazons and, in so doing, she is giving them their new identity. A further observation notes that, through the simultaneity of both acts, the mastectomy and the ritual of a baptism, the removal of the breast itself becomes ritualized.

I am considering the fracture at the breast similarly to Adam's wounds in the *Krug*, which I have read as giving physical shape to an ironic, disruptive force. In *Penthesilea*, however, the wound is self-inflicted and therefore offers a notion different from the wounds we see on Adam's body. His wounds had resulted from his own reckless hurry and then later seemed to proliferate uncontrollably as the play – and the court proceedings – progressed. In *Penthesilea*, we are instead told that Tanaïs removed her right breast herself and the Amazons after her do the same. I read this intentionally created "gap," the physical rupture, as going hand in hand with the deliberate creation of the new state. This self-inflicted injury is particularly threatening to the prevailing order, because it is through this wound that the new nation, a new order, is born. Reading this rupture in the context of irony invites the question of *Selbstironie*, self-irony, a truly self-inflicted irony. The contrast to Adam's wounds would suggest that the Amazon's body does indeed fall into this category. A differentiation between the two forms of bodily irony should be further made to best distinguish self-determined irony from involuntary irony.

I have argued before that Kleist brings the disruptive force of irony on stage, it is materialized and becomes visible through the physical shape of the body, as seen in Adam's wounds or the broken pitcher. When looking at *Penthesilea*, and the Amazons in particular, however, it almost seems as if they utilize this particular force: Tanaïs removes the breast and simultaleously baptizes the Amazons as members of the newfound nation. As the tearing off of the breast happens right before the crowning of the first queen, I am reading this rupture – with

irony in mind – as the force that allows for the new, matriarchal order to be created and, at the same time, the prevailing, patriarchal order to be threatened. Linda Hutcheon explores the power of irony to challenge and transform political structures. When discussing the potential for irony to destabilize political orders in connection with its role and interpretation in feminist discourse, she writes that

> irony has been seen as "serious play," as both "a rhetorical strategy and a political method" that deconstructs and decenters patriarchal discourses. (31ff)

While Hutcheon's study as a whole focuses more on the understanding and interpretation of irony based on shared knowledge and context, the passage quoted here reflects the ability of irony to transcend the realm of "rhetorical strategy," the use of irony as a trope, and draws a further connection to the political realm to show its potential to dismantle and change political and societal structures, more specifically, those relating to a patriarchal order. In *Penthesilea*, Kleist brings this potential onstage through the aestheticization of the body of the Amazons. He is changing the semantics of irony in a way that it is not limited to the signifying system of the spoken or written word but is expressed through the body. I think that it is particularly the close connection between the physicality of theater (a visible stage) and narrative, the blurred line between drama and narrative, that I have emphasized in the previous two chapters, that Kleist utilizes to articulate this form of physical irony.

The Amazons are creating their own state to set themselves free from male-centric rule:

> Penthesilea. [...] Frei, wie der Wind auf offnem Blachfeld, sind
> Die Fraun, die solche Heldentat vollbracht,
> Und dem Geschlecht der Männer nicht mehr dienstbar.
> Ein Staat, ein mündiger, sei aufgestellt.
> Ein Frauenstaat, den fürder keine andre
> Herrschsüchtge Männerstimme mehr durchtrotzt
> Der das Gesetz sich selber gebe,
> Sich selbst gehorche, selber auch beschütze. (*P* 15, lines 1954ff)

Their nation is one that is "no longer subserving the male" but instead one that "gives itself its own law, obeys itself, and defends itself." Without elaborating on all that sets the Amazon state apart from the male centric rule, I want to focus on one of the most prominent differences between the two social systems: the role of men as arbitrary partners to procreate. Rather than engaging in relationships based on love and expected to last a lifetime, the Amazons seek out their male partners through battle and for the sole purpose of conception. In her dialogue with the pretend prisoner Achilles in scene fifteen, Penthesilea herself gives the most detailed insight on the ritual that ensures future generations of Amazons:

> Penthesilea. [...] Marsbräute werden sie begrüßt, die Jungfraun,
> Beschenkt mit Waffen, von der Mütter Hand,
> Mit Pfeil' und Dolch, und allen Gliedern fliegt,
> Von emsgen Händen jauchzend rings bedient,
> Das erzne Gewand der Hochzeit an.
> Der Tag der Reise wird bestimmt,
> Gedämpfter Tuben Klang ertönt, es schwingt
> Die Schar der Mädchen flüsternd sich zu Pferd
> [...]
> Zum Lager fern der Auserwählten hin.
> [...]
> Und wie die feuerrote Windsbraut brechen
> Wir plötzlich in den Wald der Männer ein,
> Und wehn die Reifesten derer, die da fallen,
> Wie Samen, wenn die Wipfel sich zerschlagen,
> In unsre heimatlichen Fluren hin.
> Hier pflegen wir, im Tempel Dianas, ihrer,
> Durch heilger Feste Reihn, von denen mir
> Bekannt nichts, als der Name: Rosenfest. (*P* 15, lines 2056ff)

The Amazons thus find their sexual partners through battle. As Penthesilea shares with Achilles, sexually mature virgin warriors like herself set out to dominate men in battle and bring them home to Themiscrya where, in the Temple of Diana, they celebrate their "Feast of Roses" (Rosenfest). At this ritual orgy and "celebration of conception and motherhood," the virgins and their defeated mates participate in procreating to ensure a new generation of Amazons (Schreiber-Byers 146ff). Afterwards, their captives are then given presents and sent home. The

description of the selection of their sexual partners indicates its arbitrariness: “Und wehn die Reifesten derer, die da fallen, wie Samen, wenn die Wipfel sich zerschlagen, in unsre heimatlichen Fluren hin” (“and carry the ripest of those, who fall like seeds of thrashing treetops, home to our meadows”). Like seeds carried through the air, fertilizing plants by chance, the male partners are found incidentally. The use of the simile derived from the natural fertilization of plants not only underscores the arbitrary selection of male partners, but also stresses that it is purely based on reasons of potency, not on character or any other factor. They choose only the “ripest,” most potent sperm-provider.

While focusing on the female relationships among the Amazons, in her compelling reading of Kleist’s *Penthesilea*, Katrin Pahl also stresses the symbolism of the male counterparts for their reproduction by describing them as “arbitrary signifiers”: “Bei ihnen verschwindet der individuelle Mann als arbiträrer Signifikant hinter seiner eigentlichen Bedeutung, Samenspender zu sein” (“Geliebte Sprich” 167) This way, the reduction of males to the single purpose of reproduction, is one of the most characteristic elements of the female nation and one of their most important rules. Those who violate the ritual at the temple are punished with death (*P* 15, line 2077). When Penthesilea and Achilles meet on the battlefield by Troy, she is said to have fallen in love with him and sets out to be the one to defeat him as her mate:

Penthesilea. Der Jungfraun keine, wer immer sie sei,
Trifft den Peliden selbst! Dem ist ein Pfeil
Geschärft des Todes, der sein Haupt, was sag ich!
Der seiner Locken eine mir berührt!
Ich nur, ich weiß den Göttersohn zu fällen.
Hier dieses Eisen soll, Gefärtinnen,
Soll mit der sanftesten Umarmung ihn
(Weil ich mit Eisen ihn umarmen muß!)
An meinem Busen schmerzlos niederziehn.
Hebt euch, ihr Frühlingsblumen, seinem Fall,
Daß seiner Glieder keines sich verletze.
Blut meines Herzens mißt ich ehr, als seines. (*P* 5, lines 852ff)

Her pursuit of the Greek warrior is still partially compliant with the Amazon law of defeating the male counterpart in battle: when saying "Weil ich mit Eisen ihn umarmen muß!" ("Because I have to embrace him with armor!"), she acknowledges and abides by the Amazon law. By seeking him out and desiring to pursue him, however, she breaks the rules of her nation.

She tries to retract from this desire, briefly agreeing with the Amazons who try to convince her to leave Achilles behind and flee:

> (*Mit erzwungener Fassung*)
> Gut. Wie ihr wollt. Seis drum. Ich will mich fassen.
> Dies Herz, weil es sein muß, bezwingen will ichs. (*P* 9, lines 1195ff)

The stage direction "mit erzwungener Fassung" ("with forced composure") and Penthesilea's statement "ich will mich fassen" ("I want to pull myself together") together stress her attempt to adhere to the law and traditions of the Amazon nation. I argue, moreover, that these lines are subliminally emphasizing the close connection between body and Amazon state as well. "Fassung" in German can also be translated with "casing" or "frame." With the Amazons dressed in armor, their bodies are "cased" in armor ("in Rüstung *gefasst*"). Thus, when she announces she is pulling herself together, she is attempting to contain her herself, as her body is contained in the Amazons' suit and armor, representing and adhering to the law of their nation.

But she eventually gives in to her feelings and, as Chris Cullens and Dorothea von Mücke argue, "subjects herself to rites of patiarchal courtship" (470):

> Penthesilea. Laßt ihn kommen.
> Laßt ihn den Fuß gestählt, es ist mir recht,
> Auf diesen Nacken setzen.
> Laßt ihn mit Pferden häuptlings heim mich schleifen,
> Und diesen Leib hier, frischen Lebens voll,
> Auf offnem Felde schmachvoll hingeworfen,
> Den Hunden mag er ihn zur Morgenspeise,
> Dem scheußlichen Geschlecht der Vögel, bieten.
> *Staub lieber, als ein Weib sein, das nicht reizt.* (*P* 9, lines 1244ff, my emphasis)

In their discussion of the play, Cullen and von Mücke stress the focus on the body in this passage: "She describes his potential annihilation of herself as the dissolution of difference and destruction of the wholeness of her body" (470). Her body would lose its contours that essentially constitute and set it apart from the matter around it.

I want to focus not just on the way her body would be destroyed at the hands of Achilles, but also on her wish to "rather be dust than a woman who does not attract." In contrast to Penthesilea's efforts to retain her composure (*P* 9, lines 1195ff), she relents all attempts to maintain it. I am reading this as her giving up the (Amazon) "Fassung" and in the same act removing herself from the Amazon order, an order that does not include being attractive to men as part of their cultural system. Even more tellingly, she would rather turn into dust, countless individual pieces of shapeless matter, than keep her body, the body so closely connected with the Amazon nation. Directly following this statement, Penthesilea forcefully rips off her adornments, her necklace, physically distancing herself from the embellishments that are part of the Amazon rites. In Penthesilea's break with Amazon law – and break out of the order of their nation – we find another "fragmentation" related to the body: she is removing herself from the body of the Amazon state, the nation of female warriors that, as I have argued above, is intricately linked to the body of the Amazon woman. Tearing off a part of their body was an integral step in their inauguration and, through the repeated removal of breasts over the generations, the Amazons renew and underscore this connection, this bond to the body of the state.

The idea of identifying the state as a "body" is not new. Rooted in Greek mythology, this bodily metaphor is often said to originate in the Aesopic fable "The Belly and the Members."[101]

[101] The fable concerns the members (parts) of the body revolting against the belly. They are accusing the belly of being useless, living a good life without having to do actual labor like they do. In their effort to conspire against the belly and stopping it from receiving any food, the body as a whole becomes weaker and weaker. In the end, the

In his article "The Metaphorical Structuring of Social Perceptions," Scott Gilbert investigates this use of a physical metaphor for social structures and argues:

> Perhaps the most meaningful of the many metaphors used to organize our perceptions of society has been its comparison to an organism. [...] Since it is an extension of society's image of the physical body, the metaphor has incorporated new knowledge of the human physiology since the Greeks introduced the organic symbolism to Western culture. (167-168)

Although the body of the state is not an organism as such, following this understanding, it is still perceived as an equivalent. While the metaphor of the body politic was eventually replaced by the idea of a nation as artificially constituted, such bodily terminology persisted until the mid seventeenth century. Given Kleist's focus on bodies and physicality throughout his work and his effort in reworking a subject from Greek mythology in this play in particular, it comes as no surprise that he adapts the concept of the body politic – a concept established in Greek tradition – through the close connection of the Amazon state and the body of the Amazon.

Though an inorganic body, the body of the Amazon nation can be read as an equivalent, especially through the close bond that the Amazons created with the removal of a body part as part of the shaping their state. It must also be noted that the association between organic and inorganic, human body and body politic, can be articulated not only through the form of the body politic forged with the removal of the breast, but also through the bodily integrity of the post-mastectomy Amazon. By reading the bow, with its bent shape, as a mechanical replacement for their breast, their bodies can easily be considered as "cyborgs," a hybrid creature with both organic and inorganic parts.[102]

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members realize that, although it did not seem so at first, the belly plays a crucial role in the functioning of the body. Only if they all work together can the body as a whole can be healthy. See Aesop, p. 12.

[102] In "Die Erhabenheit des Krieges, der Technik und des Mordes," Klaus Bartels argues: "In *Penthesilea* verläßt Kleist den Diskurs des dynamisch erhabenen Krieges, weil er im Cyborg ein Bild technischer Erhabenheit gefunden hat […]. […] Ihre amputierte Brust ist duch eine Prothese ersetzt, durch den Bogen, dessen Wölbung die des fehlenden Organs nachahmt" (265ff). See also Simon Richter, p. 231: "The bow that falls from the high priestess's

Reading the Amazon nation as a body, Penthesilea's breaking away from it can be interpreted as yet another fragmentation, especially considering her position as queen, the *head* of state. How, then, can the dynamics of an ironic body apply to the fragmentation of the body of the state? Penthesilea's pursuit of Achilles and attendant break with the Amazon order is itself ironic based on the fact that she, through her role as queen, represents the national identity of the state that she is abandoning. Furthermore, there is a moment of ironic doubling between Penthesilea's removal of her breast, a repetition of the original bond between body and nation and confirmation of the membership, and her removal of herself, the head of state, from the body of the state. She removes a body part as part of the ritual to become part of the nation only to remove herself – very much as a body part – from the body politic.

In light of these thoughts on the political dimensions of Kleist's bodily irony in this play, I would like to return to the question of self-irony and involuntary irony. Having assumed that there is a notion of self-irony to be found in the fragmentation we see in the removal of the breast, it seems that Penthesilea's break with the Amazon order is a similar movement of self-irony. Complications arise, however, when considering that the Amazon queen does not seek out Achilles purely based on her own choosing. While on her deathbed, Penthesilea's mother Otere, predicted the Greek warrior would be her lover:

> Penthesilea. Sie [Otere] sagte: »geh, mein süßes Kind! Mars ruft dich!
> Du wirst den Peliden dir bekränzen:
> Werd eine Mutter, stolz und froh, wie ich –«
> Und drückte sanft die Hand mir, und verschied. (*P* 15, lines 2137ff)

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hand substitutes for the breast on many levels (metonymically, etymologically, and visibly, that is, by dint of its similar shape)."

This prediction turns Penthesilea's self-determined break from the Amazon law into an act that was directed by someone else. As Marianne Schuller remarks, it is Otere who breaks the law by naming Achilles as her daughter's love interest, as the one she should pursue:

> [D]ie Liebe zu Achilles ist keineswegs, wie es zunächst scheint, eine auf den ersten Blick; vielmehr entpuppt sie sich als eine Wirkung einer mütterlichen Prophezeiung. […] Otere, die königliche Mutter Penthesileas, bricht das Gesetz, indem sie das Liebesverbot übertritt: Sie nennt den Namen Achill (bzw. Peleide), den sie ihr als ihren Geliebten prophezeit. (50)

When Penthesilea cuts herself out of the body of the Amazon nation, she is following her mother's prophecy.

In the context of irony, then, self-irony and involuntary irony should be carefully distinguished. One could certainly argue that Penthesilea was still at least partially acting upon her own will, however, she admits to Achilles that her mother's words are the reason for her pursuit of him:

> Achilles. – Doch einen Aufschluß noch gewährst du mir […]
> Wie faß ich es,
> Daß du gerade *mich* so heiß verfolgtest?
> Es schien, ich sei bekannt dir.
> Penthesilea. Allerdings. […]
> Sie [Otere] sagte: »geh, mein süßes Kind! Mars ruft dich!
> Du wirst den Peleïden, die bekränzen:
> Wird eine Mutter, stolz und froh, wie ich –«. (*P* 15, lines 2094ff)

The question of self-determination arises even when reconsidering Penthesilea's removal of the breast. As argued above, the wound is self-inflicted but did Penthesilea cut off her breast completely of her own accord? Since it is based on a ritual, one cannot make that claim in complete truthfulness, as she was following the tradition established in the Amazon nation. For Tanaïs, the first to perform the mastectomy on herself, the ritual had not yet been established, but even she was compelled to remove the breast in response to the voice that warned her of the mockery that the women would not be able to operate the bow properly. While Penthesilea's

obedience to her mother leads to a suicide where self-irony falls prey to involuntary irony, even the removal of the breast, that is in fact self-inflicted, is still not entirely based on self-determination and underscores the question of a possibility of self-irony.

With all this in mind, it needs to be considered that the fragmentations found in *Penthesilea* have a more complex dimension than we have seen in the example of the bodies of Adam and the pitcher in the previous chapter. This complexity lies in the shift from self-determined, self-irony to involuntary irony, signaled in the preceding examples of physical irony. Perhaps the best reflection of this struggle between the two forces of self-determined fragmentation and fragmentation directed by another can be found in the ninth scene: Penthesilea is trying to "pull herself together" ("sich fassen") and conform with the rites and rules of her nation, only to "fall apart" shortly thereafter. Though Penthesilea's mother is no longer physically present to direct her to break with the law in her encounter with Achilles, we still get a sense of her "presence" in line 2160, when Penthesilea is recounting her crowning ceremony:

> Mir war, als ob die Mutter mich umschwebte. [...] [N]ichts schien mir heiliger, als ihren letzten Willen zu erfüllen. (*P* 15, lines 2160ff: It seemed to me as if my mother was all around me. […] Nothing seemed holier to me than to fulfill her last wish)

These lines reflect Penthesilea's close connection to her mother, her "presence" even after her death and her determination to pursue Achilles. "Nothing seemed holier" to her than following Otere's direction, even if it meant breaking the law of her nation.

This fulfillment of her mother's wish comes at a high price, which both Achilles and Penthesilea pay with their lives. After breaking with the rites of her nation, Penthesilea chooses to die. While her death has already been discussed in regards to the physicality of her body that it stages, the same scene also relates well to this movement from self-irony to involuntary irony.

There is yet another fragmentation of the body here, when she stabs herself numerous times with the figurative dagger that she produces out of herself. Although finite, the act of stabbing herself has a connotation of continuity, thereby contradicting the finitude of death. This continuity is reflected in the repeated "So!" in her line "So! So! So! So! Und wieder! - Nun ists gut" (*P* line 3034: "So! So! So! So! And again! - Now it is good"). It may well be noted that the act of repeatedly stabbing into one's own chest is very unlikely, which suggests instead that, with each stab, Penthesilea is killing herself over and over again until the stabbing has exhausted itself *ad absurdum*. As a consequence, I am reading her body, in the moment of continued stabbing ("So! So! So! So! Und wieder!"), vacillating between being alive and dead and, ultimately, as being both at the same time, sustaining two opposing and contradicting states of being. When considering her fragmented body as an ironic body, her stabbing then can be interpreted not only as a representation of the ambiguity of irony but also, given the repeated and unrestrained perforation of her body, as an emphasis of the inability to control it.

Although Penthesilea commits suicide, yet another aspect of this action evidences the fluctuation between her acting on her own accord, fragmenting herself and acting upon direction of her mother Otere. This becomes especially clear when she states that she is following ("folge") Achilles after his death. Before she takes her own life, she remarks:

> Penthesilea. Ich sage vom Gesetz der Fraun mich los,
> Und folge diesem Jüngling hier. (*P* 24, lines 3014ff)

Again, she is not only following him but she still is following her mother's prophecy, so even the act of stabbing, the perforation of her body, is influenced by someone else. This influence once again calls into question Penthesilea's self-irony and, with it, the ability to control irony. The self-directed fragmentation, the self-irony, never turns out to be fully based on her own accord but is rather always exposing its controllability as an illusion.

Furthermore, Penthesilea's death can also be interpreted as a perpetuation of her breaking with the Amazon law. With the line "Ich sage vom Gesetz der Fraun mich los" ("I am releasing myself from the law of the Amazons"), she is repeating and continuing what she has already done – breaking her nation's law – and is therefore emphasizing once again the fragmentation of the body politic. Interestingly, the text of the German "Ich sage vom Gesetz der Fraun mich los" also indicates that her "releasing herself" is a verbal act, as the literal translation of "ich *sage* mich los" is "I *speak* myself free."[103] On the one hand, this focus on the spoken word foreshadows her death where, as Elystan Griffith puts it, "language becomes the weapon by which she takes her own life" (470). On the other hand, the performative speech act underscores the close connection between the word and the body, as it is through the speech act that she releases herself from the body politic.

Before analyzing the comical elements of Kleist's tragedy, I also want to consider Achilles and especially his death in the context self-irony and involuntary irony. Beyond Penthesilea's, Achilles's is a second body in this play to show open wounds or "gaps" and fragmentation. Inviting defeat in battle, Achilles sets out to meet Penthesilea unarmed. We only hear what happens during their last battle – and how Achilles dies – through the words of two Amazon bystanders. The first report is given through one of the Amazons watching the battle from afar:

> Amazone. Penthesilea,
> Sie liegt den grimmgen Hunden beigesellt,
> Sie, die ein Menschenschoß gebar, und reißt -

[103] See Jacobs. In her essay, "Der Dolch der Sprache. Die Rhetorik des Feminismus," she convincingly argues for Penthesilea's performative language and her understanding of the literal and figurative use of her words. In connection with the passage quoted above, Jacobs states: "Nicht daß Penthesilea am Ende schließlich die Kontrolle über die konventionelle Funktion des Wortes, figurativ oder wörtlich, verloren hätte. [...] Penthesilea kann das wörtliche Wort gelassen benutzen (wenngleich nur, um sie von ihm loszusagen), aber sie versteht nicht weniger das andere "Wort," das figurative, das verwendet wird, um etwas anderes als es selbst zu repräsentieren, zugleich maskierend und repräsentierend, was man wirklich meint" (41ff).

Die Glieder des Achills reißt sie in Stücken.[104]

Here, it is not only Achilles's body that is ripped apart but the body of the text as well. Through the use of the hyphen ("und reißt -"), the text is performing the fragmentation of the body on a textual level, doubling the fragmentation itself, and emphasizing a connection between the word (the body of the text) and Achilles's body.

Then Meroe, an Amazon princess, gives a detailed account of Achilles's encounter with Penthesilea's on the battlefield:

> Meroe. Von allen Hunden rings umheult und Elefanten,
> Kam sie daher, den Bogen in der Hand: [...]
> Er sieht so wild und scheußlich nicht, als sie.
> *Achilleus, der,* wie man im Heer versichert,
> *Sie bloß ins Feld gerufen, um freiwillig*
> *Im Kampf, der junge Tor, ihr zu erliegen*: [...]
> Und [Penthesilea] hebt den Bogen auf und zielt und schießt,
> Und jagt den Pfeil ihm durch den Hals; er stürzt:
> Doch hetz! Schon ruft sie: Tigris! Hetz, Leäne!
> Hetz, Sphinx! Melampus! Dirke! Hetz, Hyrakon!
> Und stürzt - stürzt mit der ganzen Meut, o Diana!
> Gleich einer Hündin, Hunden beigesellt […]
> *Sie schlägt, die Rüstung ihm vom Leibe reißend,*
> *Den Zahn schlägt sie in seine weiße Brust*,
> Sie und die Hunde, die wetteifernden. (*P* 23, lines 2611ff, my emphasis)

While it is without doubt that Penthesilea is the one inflicting the wounds and tearing Achilles's body apart, we know from Meroe – and from Achilles himself, earlier in the play (*P* 21, lines 2455ff) – that he only entered the battle to pretend to fight with the Amazon queen. He wants to allow her to defeat him and let her take him to the Feast of Roses (*P* 21, line 2531: "Ich will den Tempel der Diana sehn!"). Based on this, I argue that his death, her ripping apart his body is not solely involuntary: with him subjecting himself to the battle without arms, he is, so to speak, creating an *openness* to Penthesilea's tearing him apart. Thus, using previous terms, there is an

[104] *P* 22, lines 2596ff, my emphasis: "Penthesilea, She is laying aside the ferocious dogs, She who was born from a human womb, and tears – *Achilles's limbs she tears to shreds.*"

underlying self-direction, a self-irony that is simultaneous with an involuntary irony. So again, as we have seen with Penthesilea, the representation or performance of physical irony cannot clearly be characterized as self-irony but rather maintains an ambivalence that reflects the impossibility for irony to be controlled.

Furthermore, while Penthesilea is breaking with Amazon law and removing herself from her nation, there is a countermovement of Achilles subscribing himself to the rites of the female warriors, asking the queen into the battlefield to partake in the Amazons' festival of virgins. When he first tells Diomedes of his plans to enter the final battle unarmed, he says:

> Doch eine Grille, die ihr heilig,
> Will, daß ich ihrem Schwert im Kampf erliege;
> Eh nicht in Liebe kann sie mich umfangen. (*P* 21, lines 2460ff)

Achilles is thus entering the battle to adhere to the rites of the Amazons, a movement which I am reading as an expansion of their nation. This expansion is finalized when Penthesilea rips him apart: "Den Zahn schlägt sie in seine weiße Brust" (*P* 23, line 2670: "She is sinking her tooth into his white breast"). With it being both their characteristic mark and part of the foundation of their nation, the attack on Achilles's breast can be interpreted as his being entered into their state. When Penthesilea attacks his left breast, it is not simply a repetition but a mirroring of the Amazons' breast removal of the right breast, distorting the rite but at the same time complementing it.[105] Therefore, their bodies – Penthesilea's having cut herself out of the Amazon nation and Achilles's having entered it – are performing an ambivalence, a countermovement of entering and leaving the nation, reducing and expanding the Amazon state.

What does this leave us to say about Kleist's irony in *Penthesilea* and its relationship to other concepts and ideas of irony? Through his ironic adaption of the classical myth, his multiplication of deaths and his amendation to the outcome of the play, his emphasis on the

[105] See *P* 23, line 2673. See also Simon Richter, p. 246.

fragmentation of the Amazons' bodies as an ironic force threatening a prevailing order, and his revelation of the ambivalence of irony and uncontrollability that we have seen in the self-directed and involuntary fragmentation of the bodies of Penthesilea and Achilles in *Penthesilea*, Kleist introduces a complexity of ironic notions, dramatized on stage. This complexity that almost seems like a "cluster" of ironies is, however, both deeply connected with – and performed by – the body on stage. Without a doubt, Schlegel's thoughts on irony and Kleist's irony intersect in several ways. Schlegel's *Lyceum* fragment 48, "Ironie ist die Form des Paradoxen," was already discussed in connection with my reading of *Der zerbrochne Krug.* Here, in *Penthesilea*, we are seeing a paradox again in the way the fragmentation is both self-directed and involuntary and the bodies reflect and perform self-irony and involuntary irony. This paradox, the sustaining of contradicting poles, has also been seen in Penthesilea's own death, in that she is stabbing (killing) herself over and over again.

Tragic Opportunities for the Comic

In an epigram with the title "Komödienzettel," published in 1808 in his journal *Phöbus*, Heinrich von Kleist writes:

> Heute zum ersten Mal mit Vergunst, die Penthesilea, Hundekomödie; Acteurs: Helden und Köter und Fraun. (*BKA* 3: 47)

Calling the tragedy *Penthesilea* essentially a comedy – and a "comedy for the dogs" ("Hundekomödie") no less – seems surprising at the least. As Griffith notes, Kleist utilized the epigrams to imitate his critics: "One of the key strategies that Kleist deploys in the epigrams is to mimic the voice of his critics, and thereby to expose their supposedly crass judgements to ridicule" (454). A commentary like the one on *Penthesilea* should thus be taken with a grain of

salt. I agree with Griffith's argument, however, that while *Penthesilea* should not be in its entirety understood as a comedy, it still contains comic aspects. This is not surprising, as it has been widely accepted – and as we have also seen in this study's discussion of *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* – that Kleist's genres are not confined to strict boundaries. There are tragic aspects in his comedies and, as Griffith remarks, his tragedies never "entirely exclude the possibility of laughter" (458). Therefore, despite the presumably intended mockery of his critics, I am taking Kleist at his word, analyzing comic effects in *Penthesilea.* From the existing studies that consider aspects of comedy in Kleist's tragedies, I will mostly be drawing on Justus Fetscher and Elystan Griffith to build my argument.[106] While these studies offer a comprehensive insight on the comic side of *Penthesilea*, I want to draw the focus once more on physicality and argue that corporeality not only plays a central role in the tragedy in general but also shapes the comic effects of the play.

As is widely accepted – and as I have shown above – *Penthesilea* is a play that aims particular attention to the body. Although Dirk Grathoff has been quoted for considering *Penthesilea* a play that at first seems to "lack the body" ("körperarm"), he still stresses that the focus always returns to the body:

> Im Grunde genommen ist die *Penthesilea* ein ausgesprochen körperarmes oder -leeres Drama, das seine Handlung kaum durch direktes körperliches Agieren, sondern weitgehend durch sprachliche Vermittlung, durch Erzählungen, Berichte und Schilderungen entstehen läßt. In einer Sprache allerdings, die eine ungeheure Dynamik der Handlung entfaltet, und die im thematischen Zentrum immer wieder

[106] To my knowledge, Justus Fetscher was the first to write on humorous aspects in Kleist's Penthesilea. In his essay "Über das Komische in Kleists Trauerspiel *Penthesilea*," he categorizes and analyses several comic effects of the play. Among those categories are the use of bathos, the semantic comedy that can be found in misconceptions, and the comic effect of the play on gender roles. Bianca Theisen's contribution, ""Helden und Köter und Fraun": Kleists Hundekomödie," draws the connection to Shakespeare when she focuses on Kleist's blending of comedy and tragedy. Elystan Griffith's "Gender, Laughter, and the Desecration of Enlightenment: Kleist's *Penthesilea* as 'Hundekomödie'" suggests, to some extent, the possibility for Kleist's tragedy to be read as a "misogynistic comedy" (461ff). In "Camp (Drummer Boys)," a chapter from Pahl's recent book *Sex Changes with Kleist*, she considers *Penthesilea* as an example for Kleist's "camp humor," a humor that combines "gender, sexuality, and kinship" and "war and martial law" (116).

> um die Körper der Agierenden kreist, do daß es Kleist in dialektischer Wendung es sich nicht versagen möchte, umgekehrt auch *die Körper selbst auf der Bühne zur Sprache kommen zu lassen*.[107]

This focus on the body and "letting the body speak," as we have seen in this and the previous two chapters, is not limited to this tragedy, but a general theme that we can see on Kleist's stage.

For *Penthesilea,* this focus on the body can already be observed through the extensive descriptions of bodies and physical reactions right in the beginning. Here, Odysseus is telling Diomedes and Antilochus about his and Achilles's first encounter with Penthesilea, giving a detailed description of her physical reaction, her blushing, upon meeting the Greek warrior:

> Odysseus. Sieht sie in unsre Schar, von Ausdruck leer,
> Als ob in Stein gehaun wir vor ihr stünden;
> Hier diese flache Hand, versichr' ich dich,
> Ist ausdrucksvoller als ihr Angesicht:
> Bis jetzt ihr Aug auf den Peliden trifft:
> Und Glut ihr plötzlich, bis zum Hals hinab,
> Das Antlitz färbt, als schlüge rings um ihr
> Die Welt in helle Flammenlohe auf. (*P* 1, lines 64ff)

As Bożena Chołuj states in her essay about the play, the characters in *Penthesilea* "pay very close attention" to each other.[108] The characters amongst each other "read" the bodies of their counterparts to gain information. In this passage, Odysseus is clearly puzzled by Penthesilea's physical reactions and cannot figure out her expressions. Fetscher interprets Odysseus as the first "victim" of a "travesty of the myth" ("Opfer dieser Mythentravestie," 51). He further points out that from the very beginning of the play, we can see the comic effect of *bathos*, the "slipping of the sublime" (the world of the myth) into the "trivial."[109] (51) In Kleist's adaption of the classic

[107] See *Kleist*, p. 132, my emphasis. See also, for example, Chołuj, p. 105.
[108] See Chołuj, p. 106. Chołuj's reading "Auf den Körper schauen und hören: Zur Körperproblematik in Heinrich von Kleists *Penthesilea* und *Die Marquise von O…*" investigates the significance of the body in two of his works and pays particular attention to the way in which the characters describe and interpret each other based on the observation of physical traits.
[109] We see a similar argument in Theisen, who draws on Fetscher when she writes, "So stimmt etwa [diese] dem Bereich des Erhabenen zuzuordnende Vorstellung des endlosen Falls nicht mit der konkreten Angabe der

myth, Fetscher argues convincingly, Odysseus is no longer characterized as the hero that we see in the *Iliad* but is introduced as someone who is perplexed, even clueless. According to Fetscher, it is one of the first indications of the "comedy of the bathos" (51) in Kleist's play.

Penthesilea, moreover, interrupts Odysseus in the middle of his speech to convince her to combine forces against the Trojans, leaving the two Greek heroes, Odysseus and Achilles, confused and amused:

> Doch mit Erstaunen, in dem Fluß der Rede,
> Bemerk ich, daß sie mich nicht hört. Sie wendet,
> mit einem Ausdruck der Verwunderung,
> Gleich einem sechzehnjährigen Mädchen plötzlich,
> Das von den olympischen Spielen wiederkehrt.
> Zu einer Freundin sich,
> Und ruft: solch einem Mann, o Prothoe, ist
> Otere, meine Mutter, nie begegnet. (*P* 1, lines 83ff)

In the following lines, Odysseus continues to attempt to figure out the Amazon queen through the interpretation of her body:

> Sie ruht, sie selbst, mit trunknem Blick schon wieder
> Auf des Äginers schimmernde Gestalt:
> […]
> Darauf mit der Wangen Rot, wars Wut, wars Scham,
> Die Rüstung wieder bis zum Gurt sich färbend,
> Verwirrt und stolz und wild zugleich: sie sei
> Penthesilea. (*P* 1, lines 93ff)

But he is still unable to make sense of it ("wars Wut, wars Scham," "Verwirrt und stolz und wild zugleich").[110] As Odysseus is trying to read Penthesilea's body, it is showing physical reactions (blushing) after first encountering Achilles. One could say, her body is reacting, even responding to his.

Klafterhöhe zusammen, ein Kippen vom Pathos in Bathos, das bereits von Kleists Zeitgenossen als komisch empfunden wurde" (132).

[110] Marianne Schuller discusses the inability of Amazons and Greeks to understand each other as based on different signifying systems. Their misunderstanding is a result of the Amazons' metaphorical order that cannot be comprehended by the "non-figural" order of the Greek: "Da die Griechen-Ordnung auf nicht-figuraler Direktheit beruht, können sie die amazonisch metaphorisch gemeinte Gewalt nur als Kriegshandlung mißverstehen" (122).

This focus on the body and, more specifically, the reading of the body will continue throughout the play. Whether it is Penthesilea's body that is described, her "flowing locks" (*P* 2, line 290), her "small hands" (2, line 291), or Achilles's "massive neck and shoulders" (3, line 359), the bodies capture the eyes and "take the breath" of the beholder:

> Ein Myrmidonier. O, mir vergeht der Atem.
> […]
> O, wie er mit der Linken
> Vor über seiner Rosse Rücken geht!
> Wie er die Geißel umschwingt über sie! (*P* 3, lines 375ff)

For the final battle, the objectives of Achilles and Penthesilea could not be further apart from each other. Achilles enters their encounter with the mindset of seduction, expecting to, in the end, take part in the Feast of Roses with Penthesilea, but she is prepared for a fight that will kill him. Based on the theory of incongruity, as we have seen it in the second chapter of this study, there is a humorous element in the stark discrepancy between the mindsets of Achilles and Penthesilea when they are setting out to meet each other in battle. Their expectations could not be further apart: Achilles is sure he is getting sex out of it, while she is there to kill. What makes the incongruity even funnier is Achilles's insistence on his expectations: ignoring the warnings from his fellow Greeks, he asserts "Sie *tut* mir nichts, sag ich!" (*P* 21, line 2471).

The interjection "sag *ich*" (my emphasis: "*I* say") is telling, as it underscores that it is Achilles – and only Achilles – who is convinced that she will not do him any harm. In retrospect, his insistence emphasizes the incongruity – and with it its comic effect – that we see in their final encounter. We notice Achilles's overly self-assertive attitude earlier in the play when he is sure that the Amazon queen, like any other woman, will be unable to resist him:

> Achilles. Im Leben keiner öden war ich spröd;
> Seit mir der Bart gekeimt, ihr lieben Freunde,
> Ihr wißts, zu Willen jeder war ich gern. (*P* 4, lines 599ff)

He proudly exclaims that he knows his effect on women around him and he does not see Penthesilea any differently. I am reading this passage as yet another example of bathos: Achilles, one of the greatest heroes Greek mythology has to offer, is boasting about his success with women, which he has enjoyed "ever since" his "beard sprouted," a reference to his sexual maturation, but also yet another hint at his lower, sexual drive. It comes as no surprise then that he is sure of himself and his success in conquering Penthesilea as his love interest when he makes his last move towards her, armed with only a spear.

But Penthesilea charges at him with brute force and, despite the gruesome scene that is about to unfold, Achilles's reaction is highly comical:

> Stutzt er, und dreht den schlanken Hals, und horcht.
> Und eilt entsetzt, und stutzt, und eilet wieder. (*P* 23, lines 2629ff)

The repetition of his stopping short and rushing and stopping short and rushing again seem particularly funny, if we remember this is Achilles, the muscular Greek hero. His neck is now no longer described as "massive" (*P* 3, line 359), but as "lean" ("schlank"). Earlier in the drama, his body had been considered in terms of magnitude. In the third act, we even hear the astonished Myrmidonier exclaim that, in her approach to Achilles, "Penthesilea is already growing to match him in size!" (*P* 3, line 409: "Sie wächst zu seiner Größe schon heran!"). This statement is comical in itself, as it can be read as alluding to gender roles and the surprise of a male warrior meeting a female warrior – quite literally – eye-to-eye. But I would like to focus on reading it instead in connection with the passage mentioned earlier and Achilles's "stopping short," acting "like a young deer" (*P* 23, line 2631: "Gleich einem jungen Reh,"), and ducking around the bushes. In comparison with the magnificent Achilles from scene 3, the Achilles in the scene of the final battle is decreased in size. While before, Penthesilea was "growing to match his size," in a reverse movement, the Greek warrior now appears to be diminishing.

Again, we see the comic effect closely linked to the body. Achilles's physical appearance is ridiculed when he is described as having shrunk from a big, muscular hero, to a small, skittish animal. I am thus reading this passage as a physical representation of bathos and its comic effect. The anticlimax seen in the drop from sublime to ridiculous is physically expressed through the decline in his size. The sensitive use of teichoscopy plays an important role in conveying bathos here. On the one hand, it makes it possible for the body to "shrink," as it is a technique that allows for the visualization of that which is impossible to represent.[111] On the other hand, it facilitates a particular focus on the reading of Achilles's body. While he does not appear on stage, Meroe's report of Achilles's physical appearance, in a way, it amplifies it. In her reading of the use of katharsis in *Penthesilea*, Gabriele Brandstetter argues: "Der Körper der Darsteller ist nicht Medium einer *mimetischen Verkörperung* […] sondern er wird gleichsam zur Leinwand, auf die jene […] Bilder projeziert erscheinen" (233). Her convincing analysis of the use of teichoscopy in the play focuses on the broadening of the perspective of the reader and audience and their ability to experience the enactment and "narratio" (Brandstetter 232ff). For the purposes of this study, her description of the "body as a canvas" is particularly apt, for it captures the potential of the body as means of representation. Achilles's body becomes the canvas to represent the comic effect of bathos.

Following the description of Achilles diminished in size, the notion of him as young and small is underscored yet again when he calls out for Odysseus like a child for a parent:

> Meroe. Er ruft: Odysseus! mit beklemmter Stimme.
> Und sieht sich schüchtern um, und ruft: Tydide! (*P* 23, lines 2633ff)

[111] Gabriele Brandstetter describes the use of "Botenbericht" as "jene Darstellungsform, die dem Zuschauer mittelbar, in der Diegesis einer am Geschehen nicht beteiligten Figur, vor Augen stellt, was in der unmittelbaren szenischen Präsentation unmöglich repräsentierbar erscheint" (230ff).

The use of the patronymic Tydide for Diomedes emphasizes this notion of father-son relationship. With the picture of Achilles in mind that the characters had already drawn of him onstage – the strong, great warrior who defeated Hector – this portrayal of him seems nothing short of ridiculous. After he realizes he cannot escape and "run back to his friends" (*P* 23, lines 2635f.), he hides behind a spruce:

> Meroe. Und hebt die Händ empor, und duckt und birgt
> In eine Fichte sich, der Unglücksel'ge,
> Die schwer mit dunklen Zweigen niederhangt. (*P* 23, lines 2637ff)

A rather silly reaction to Penthesilea's approach with an army of dogs and elephants, a reaction that turns the dramatic moment into a comic scene.

Earlier in the play, Penthesilea, preparing to face Achilles, is gathering her dogs and elephants (*P* 20, lines 2406ff). Upon hearing the news of her gearing up for battle, Achilles still assumes it as part of her plan to follow the Amazons' ritual but is stumped when a messenger tells him about the animals:

> Der Herold. [...] sie naht schon;
> Jedoch mit Hunden auch und Elefanten,
> Und einem ganzen wilden Reutertroß:
> Was die beim Zweikampf sollen, weiß ich nicht.
> Achilles. [...] – Mit Hunden sagst du?
> Der Herold. Ja.
> Achilles. Und Elefanten? (*P* 21, lines 2536ff)

His responses – "with dogs, you say?" ("Mit Hunden sagst du?"), "and elephants?" – reflect his confusion, a valid reaction, considering that elephants were not used for military purposes during the historical period in which Achilles is imagined: there are no elephants in Homer's *Iliad* and the mythological Achilles would have never seen them in battle.[112] It is then all the more

[112] See Anglim et al., p. 126: "The use of elephants in warfare was largely confined to India until the fourth century BCE, when Alexander the Great invaded India and fought King Porus in the Battle of the Hydaspes (328 BC)." While elephants were not part of the Homeric poems, ivory was well known in ancient Greece. See, for example, Glover, p. 143: "Here one may recall that ivory was known to the Greeks long before they ever saw the elephant; there is plenty of ivory in the Homeric poems, but Homer is silent about the elephant."

surprising that Penthesilea utilizes them to fight her opponent. Achilles's response is an indication of the ridiculousness of elephants being introduced into the scene here ("Elefanten?").

Following this, I am reading their use as a comic exaggeration of her preparation for the fight. Not only are they a Kleistian addition to the mythological material but they are also inappropriate by nearly all considerations. Aside from appearing hundreds of years too early, they were not used in single combat but utilized to break larger formations of an army.[113] The messenger is commenting on this ridiculous entourage when he says "Was die beim Zweikampf sollen, weiß ich nicht" (*P* 21, line 2539: "How they belong in a single combat, I don't know"); a funny statement that captures the perplexity caused by Amazon's unreasonably excessive troops. In a way, this and Achilles's response ("Elefanten?") could even be read as a parabasis, as a commentary regarding the ridiculousness of this scene, directed at the audience.

As mentioned before, Achilles makes his way to meet Penthesilea "armed" with only a spear, expecting only a symbolic battle, a ritual of the Amazons. For Penthesilea however, there is an argument to be made that she is not even entering a battle but instead setting off on a hunt:

> Meroe. Die Doggen hinter ihr, Gebirg und Wald
> Hochher, *gleich einem Jäger*, überschauend. (*P* 23, lines 2642ff, my emphasis)

Meroe specifically compares her to a "hunter" here and Penthesilea, shortly thereafter, takes her bow and shoots Achilles in the neck. She is not finished though, not even after he collapses. It is now, when he is on the ground and struggling, that her actions are no longer those of a human hunter, but those of a hunting animal. This transformation is reflected in the change of words that Meroe uses to describe her. The description "Gleich einem Jäger" ("Like a hunter") is turned into "Gleich einer Hündin" ("Like a dog"):

[113] See Glover, p. 143: "the usual tactic was to deploy them line abreast in front of the battle line, where they could disrupt enemy formations."

Meroe. Und stürzt - stürzt mit der ganzen Meut, o Diana!
Sich über ihn, und reißt - reißt ihm beim Helmbusch.
Gleich einer Hündin, Hunden beigesellt,
Der greift die Brust ihm, dieser greift den Nacken. (*P* 23, lines 2657ff, my emphasis)

"Like a dog amongst dogs," Penthesilea is attacking her prey. The savagery of her animalistic onslaught is emphasized through the use of the verb "reißen." It can translate as "to tear" or "to rip" but often means "to kill," in the reference to the attacks of predatory animals . I am thus reading the repetition of *reißen* here as an emphasis on the double meaning through her dog-like behavior. While she had been described in the stage directions as "twitching with fury" before (*P* 20, line 2407: "mit zuckender Wildheit"), this fury is now fully unleashed.

There is a clear reference in this scene to the myth of Diana, the goddess of wild animals and hunting.[114] According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Actaeon is transformed by Diana into a deer and is ripped apart by his dogs (Hederich 52ff). The similarities between this story and certain passages in *Penthesilea* are considerable: not only is Achilles described as a "young deer" (*P* 23, line 2631: "Gleich einem jungen Reh") but Meroe's exclamation "o Diana" (23, line 2657) can be read both as calling out for the goddess as well as recognizing Diana in Penthesilea. But unlike the the Diana myth, Kleist has Penthesilea turn into an animal herself. In the *Metamorphoses*, Diana does not physically partake in the killing and ripping apart of Actaeon's body, which is all done by his own dogs. In Kleist's adaptation of the myth, Penthesilea is described as a "dog" herself and is attacking, biting, and killing Achilles.

With this revision, Kleist is folding one myth into the other, blending and exaggerating them. In a way, he is taking the myths into the battlefield and virtually fragmenting and rearranging them. This fragmentation of myth is also reflected in the names of Penthesilea's dogs. Some (*P* 23, lines 2655ff: "Tigris," "Leäne," and "Melampus") are directly adapted from

[114] See also Fetscher, p. 62.

the Diana myth as they were the names of three of Actaeon's dogs (Hederich 52ff). Other names, like "Dirke" and "Sphinx" (*P* 23, line 2656), are taken from other mythological figures and represent brutality, a compound body, and transformation, which reinforces the savagery of Penthesilea's attack on Achilles and the change in her state of being from hunter (23, line 2642: "Jäger") to a predatory animal (23, line 2659, "Hündin"; 23, line 2666, "Löwin"). These names also reverberate with the notion of Penthesilea as a centauress, a half human, half animal creature:[115] Penthesilea herself is described as "Kenthaurin" twice in the play (*P* 1, line 118; and 4, line 548), a creature that, similar to the sphinx, is assembled out of human and animal parts. The dogs are not just joining her in the killing, but they are also reflecting and emphasizing her animalistic side on more than one level. With this in mind, they can be read as a multiplication of her presence and of her animalistic drive, evidencing yet another excess in her attack.

It is this excess that lies both at the root of the brutality of the killing and the comic effect of it. I have already discussed the excessiveness of Penthesilea's use of elephants and now with her transformation into a dog, the dogs around her can be seen as emphasizing and multiplying the relization of the animalistic drive to hunt and kill, creating an overabundance of violence. When we read this overabundance against the foil of Achilles's expectations of sex and participation in the Feast of Roses, the incongruence between the excessive armament and violence with which he is met is ridiculous and comical. This humorous effect is reflected once more when Achilles himself asks Penthesilea, "Ist dies das Rosenfest, das du versprachst?" (*P* 23, line 2661: "Is this the Feast of Roses that you promised"). While the passage doubtless reflects the tragedy of the moment – Achilles lying on the ground, gravely wounded and at the

[115] The entry in Hederich references Hyginus, according to whom Dirce transformed herself into a well, "daß sie endlich selbst von dem Bacchus in besagten Brunnen verwandelt worden" (949). See also the entry to "Sphinx," in Hederich, pp. 2253ff., especially 2255: the sphinx was said to have "ein Jungferngesicht, allein Brust, Füße, und Schwanz eines Löwen, nebst Flügeln eines Vogels."

brink of death, "softly touching Penthesilea's cheek" (*P* 23, line 2663: "Rührt sanft ihre Wange an") – his question, if read not as rhetorical but instead as a sincere inquiry ("*Is* this the Feast of Roses?)," can also be interpreted as ridiculous and comical. How could he possibly assume that, after Penthesilea has met him with full force – with elephants, no less – after she has shot him in the neck with her bow, and after he is already rolling in his own blood, that this is a celebration of procreation? To us it is quite obviously the opposite and it should be most obvious to Achilles. It is a silly question indeed, considering what is happening with and around him.

But his question also draws attention to the ritual he is expecting: the traditional hunt of the Amazons that Penthesilea described to him when she shared details about the history and practices of her state (*P* 15, lines 2035ff). What he is met with is not, however, a symbolically charged, sublimated ritual that would secure the continued existence and reproduction of the Amazon nation, but instead Penthesilea's animalistic drive to hunt and kill. The comic effect of the scene then lies in this drop from a higher, socially regulated and accepted tradition to an activity guided solely by a lower, animalistic drive. It is yet another example of bathos. Keeping in mind that this is the Amazon queen, the head of state who here is guided solely by her animalistic drives, biting her opponent to death, makes the drop from the high (the sublimated hunting ritual) to the low (animalistic hunting and killing) even steeper. She uses her bow only once to injure him, but for the killing itself she will use only her body, her mouth and her teeth.

While one might argue that Achilles already enters the fight based on his interest in pursuing Penthesilea and led by his sex drive, he still subscribes to the ritual. On several occasions, the last of which is his above discussed dying question to Penthesilea, he mentions his understanding of and, in fact, commitment to the Amazons' tradition:

> Doch eine Grille, die ihr heilig,
> Will, daß ich ihrem Schwert im Kampf erliege;

Eh nicht in Liebe kann sie mich umfangen (*P* 21, lines 2460ff);

Ich will den Tempel der Diana sehn! (21, line 2531)

Penthesilea, as I have argued before, is instead on a hunt, a very physical hunt that is not in accordance with Amazon rites. The fact that she does not follow the tradition of her nation, of which she is queen, but kills him, only using her body, already adds another notion of bathos: the Amazon queen turns into a hunting dog.

Directly after Meroe finishes her report of the battle between the two warriors, the priestesses have an exchange that, again, in response to Penthesilea's actions seem nothing but comical:

> Die erste Priesterin. Solch eine Jungfrau, Hermia! So *sittsam*! (*P* 23, line 2677, my emphasis)

The priestess does not acknowledge what happened. She does not ask "how could she?", or indicate disbelief, but rather begins by announcing the goodness of Penthesilea. Modest ("Sittsam") is a highly inappropriate description of Penthesilea's actions that recalls the discrepancy between the characterization of Käthchen narrated by her father and her action of jumping out of the window. All the more underscored is this correlation in the following lines that describe her as "so skillful in all the arts of the hands," "delightful," and "full of reason and dignity and grace":

> Die erste Priesterin. In jeder Kunst der Hände so geschickt!
> So reizend, wenn sie tanzte, wenn sie sang!
> So voll Verstand und Würd und Grazie! (*P* 23, lines 2678ff)

Like in Kleist's *Käthchen von Heilbronn*, there is a stark difference between the characteristics that align with the chosen terminology of an idealistic bourgeois framework and the actual actions of the female protagonist. Here, however, I am reading this reference as an ironic nod to

the late eighteenth-century concept of grace, as the Amazon nation was founded as a state that lies outside of a patriarchal-bourgeois order.

The juxtaposition of Käthchen and Penthesilea is nothing new to this study. After all, Kleist himself drew their connection when he said in a letter to his confidante, Marie von Kleist:

> das [Käthchen] ist die Kehrseite [der] Penthesilea[,] ihr andrer Pol. (*BKA* 4.3: 117ff)

In a letter to Josef von Collin, Kleist again links the two characters:

> Denn wer das Käthchen liebt, dem kann die Penthesilea nicht ganz unbegreiflich sein, sie gehören ja wie das [Plus] und das [Minus] der Algebra zusammen, und sind Ein und dasselbe Wesen, nur unter entgegengesetzten Beziehungen gedacht. (*BKA* 4.3: 234ff)

In the quotation from scene twenty-three above, the characters' connection or commonality lies in both their characterization with terms of the idealist concept of "gracefulness" and their divergence from these terms, which lies in their behavior. As the first priestess begins to praise the queen's virtues, the high priestess then interjects these depictions of character:

> Die Oberpriesterin. O die gebar Otere nicht! Die Gorgo
> Hat im Palast der Hauptstadt sie gezeugt! (*P* 23, lines 2681ff)

The high priestess's claims that it was not Otere but Gorgo, a monster, who "conceived" Penthesilea ("gezeugt"), hinting at her gruesome behavior. But the first priestess continues undeterred ("fortfahrend") and even expands her praise:

> Die erste Priesterin. *(fortfahrend)*
> Sie war wir von der Nachtigall geboren,
> Die um den Tempel der Diana wohnt.
> Gewiegt im Eichenwipfel saß sie da,
> Und flötete, und schmetterte und flötete
> […]
> Sie trat den Wurm nicht, den gesprenkelten,

Der unter ihrer Füße Sohle spielte.[116]

About twenty lines earlier, Penthesilea had been described as a dog attacking Achilles and, ten lines before that, she was sinking her teeth into his skin. Now she is described as a chirping nightingale, a comparison as inappropriate as it is comical. The leap in register effected by these descriptions pulls the audience and readers from one emotion to the next, shifting quickly from the horror that results from the atrocity that Penthesilea committed to sensing the humor in this ridiculously inadequate comparison with a small songbird.

It should be mentioned, however, that the German word *schmettern* refers to "to sing loudly" or even "to blare" but can also be translated as "to throw forcefully" or "to dash." With this duality, there is an underlying connotation of violence even in the nightingale's song, yet another layer of incongruity. As Amy Emm remarks, "Penthesilea's song hovers between violence and peace" (319). This "hovering" is a particularly fitting description when looking at the position of the verb *schmettern*, placed, almost hidden, between the repeated "flöten." What is more, the nightingale has frequently appeared in European music and literature throughout the centuries. Its first mention is in the second epos accredited to Homer, the *Odyssey*, where a nightingale weeps for her son Itylus, whom she accidentally killed.[117] The accidental killing evidences a similarity between the *Odyssey* and Kleist's adaptation of Homer's *Iliad*, which once again underscores the different fragments of ancient mythology that Kleist weaves into his tragedy.[118] The reading of the use of "Nachtigall" and her singing emphasizes again the notion of

[116] *P* 23, lines 2683ff. In the *Iliad*, Gorgo ("Gorgon") is described as a terrifying monster; see, for example, Homer, pp. 349 and 377. In later years the term "Gorgoneans" referred to the three sisters Medusa, Stheno, and Euryale. All three of them were described as having snakes instead of hair on their heads: "Sie hatten Köpfe voller schuppichten Schlangen an statt der Haare" (Hederich 1167ff).
[117] See Chandler, p. 78: "The earliest poetic passage on the nightingale is one of the most beautiful. It is in the *Odyssey*." For the passage in Homer, see the *Odyssey*, p. 273: "Just as the daughter of Pandareüs, the nightingale of the greenwood, sings sweetly, when spring is newly come, as she sits perched amid the thick leafage of the trees, and with many trilling notes pours out her rich voice."
[118] See Chandler, p. 79; and Homer, *Iliad*, p. 273.

ambiguity that can be seen throughout the play (*P* 21, line 2456: "Halb Furie, halb Grazie"; 1, line 118: "Kentaurin") and that I have drawn on for my argument in this chapter.[119]

Although Joachim Pfeiffer's reading of *Penthesilea* does not focus on the comic effect of the incongruence in this scene, his description of its confusion as an "imposition" on the reader is quite fitting.[120] Above, I have described Kleist ripping apart myths and reassembling them. It is clear here, though, that it is not only the bodies in the drama and the myths that come apart but the reader too, is torn between emotions. Similarly, the play as a whole is neither only a tragedy nor only a comedy. It is a tragedy that rips open in moments where the comic effect comes through.

[119] Joachim Pfeiffer mentions that it is in fact the male nightingale who sings and reads this as Kleist's play, switching gender roles (192). However, it seems to me that it is rather a play with gender stereotypes, as it was first believed that it was the female bird's beautiful song that was described. This becomes both evident in the etymology of the term "Nachtigall" (Nachtsängerin) (*EWD*, 907: "Der westgerm[anische] Vogelname bedeutet eigent[lich] 'Nachtsängerin.'") as well as its use in ancient mythology as it is referring to females (e.g. "the daughter of Pandareüs" in Homer's *Odyssey*). It is likely that Kleist was aware that it is the male bird's song that can be heard at night (*DWB* 13, s. v. "Nachtigall" and "Nachtigallmännchen": "ein nachtigallmännchen wird locken die braut mit lieblichem tief aufflötendem laut"). Thus, it can be argued that – given the play being an adaptation of ancient mythology, he did not simply use the term "Nachtigall" to describe a female character to switch genders but in fact used it in line with Greek tradition. This understanding, in turn, would allow for the use of the bird to be read as Kleist's playing with gender stereotypes and the notion of beauty (in song) associated only with females. Another emphasis on the critique of a fixed, idealistic framework I have mentioned before.

[120] See Pfeiffer, p. 193: "Wie sollte der Leser nicht […] verwirrt und verunsichert sein über die Zumutungen dieses Textes?"

Conclusion

In the afterword to her book *She Changes by Intrigue*, Lydia Rainford suggests that concluding a study on irony might entail "compromising its subject" (233). I agree that it seems counterintuitive to add conclusive remarks to a discussion that, in large part, emphasizes irony's elusive character and the impossibility for it to be contained, let alone defined. But this study shows that there is an even more distinct and distinguishable characteristic to Kleist's irony as it materializes in the body. Given this distinction, together with the fact that a considerable portion of this dissertation discussed aspects of comic effects that evidenced an often decidedly complex representation and performance of the body, conclusive remarks seem not only justified, but duly necessary.

With the main focus on broken bodies in Kleist's plays, the objective of this dissertation project was twofold: to interpret a distinct physical form of comedy and to examine ways in which the bodies in Kleist's dramas reflect and perform a materialized form of irony. The guiding questions that examined how these broken bodies create and articulate particular forms of comedy and irony led to intricate analyses and arguments. This intricacy is in part due to the layering of narrative and dramatic elements in the plays at hand, as well as to the complexity of biological, mechanical, and textual bodies. Additionally, different theories and concepts demanded consideration in the analysis of the specific "broken bodies at play."

Drawing on thoughts by Kant, Schopenhauer, August Wilhelm Schlegel, and Bergson for the study of comic elements in *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* showed that Kleist utilizes key aspects of their theories to create his own take on the comic, one that is decidedly connected to the broken body. Kleist combines elements from their theoretical and philosophical ideas and

introduces them into his plays through the bodies of the text and on stage. Furthermore, Schiller's ideas on grace and the "beautiful soul" were instrumental in the analysis of this play as they were central to the argument of a comic effect of incongruence, as seen in Schopenhauer as well as Kant. As has been shown, Theobald's exaggerated characterization of his daughter Käthchen, in line with Schiller's ideas on grace, cuts a stark contrast to her actions. Described as modest and graceful, the young woman's (literal) fall for the count does not align with this bourgeois idealistic framework. Not only can her act of throwing herself out of the window be interpreted as a "fall from (Schiller's) grace," but the breaking of her legs can also be understood as a breaking with these same ideals.

Kleist uses a physical form of the comic, specifically through incongruence, both to create a humorous effect for the audience's enjoyment and to comment and criticize bourgeois norms prevailing at the time. Theobald's description of his daughter and his account of her fall from the window also shows the discrepancy between the idealistic image of a graceful woman and a woman who has desires and acts to follow them. A similar incongruence is also at the root of a comic effect that we see in *Penthesilea*. There, Achilles enters the battlefield armed with a single spear, expecting a merely symbolic, non-violent fight, but is instead met with Penthesilea's troops of dogs and elephants. Her excessive entourage, in juxtaposition with his single spear, offers a stark disproportion. Despite the looming violent battle, this discrepancy nonetheless makes his weapon seem ridiculous and funny.

Likewise, the use of bathos in *Penthesilea* introduces an imbalance, a slope between the "sublime" and the "trivial" (Fetscher 51). Achilles, the great, muscular warrior turns into a skittish animal and acts like a little boy, calling for his family. The transformation of his body from a seemingly unconquerable man into a small and helpless deer is patently ridiculous.

Beyond their focus on the body, the examples of comical effects and elements from across the plays all share some link to the notion of violence. Käthchen's legs are breaking on the pavement and Achilles is entering his last battle, facing Penthesilea who will kill him gruesomely – yet the elements in both scenes tightly align violence and the comic in Kleist's representation of bodies.

Principle aspects from A. W. Schlegel's thoughts on the comic were especially conducive for the reading of higher and lower drives and their physical representation.[121] As the previous chapters showed, the bodies of the female protagonists in both *Penthesilea* and *Käthchen* are moving or reacting, "following" lower, animalistic drives, evoking comic effects. Käthchen's leap from the window, a downward movement, counters Strahl's upward movement as he is mounting his horse (*SW* 1, lines 182ff). Reading this scene as an example of bodily comedy helps us to interpret how Kleist is critiquing idealistic standards. By creating a play in which the woman whose character was supposed to correspond to the idealistic concept of the "beautiful soul" in fact throws herself down onto the street, reflecting and performing the movement from a high to a low moral standard, Kleist is using this form of physical comedy to poke fun at the idealistic framework.

Although Penthesilea does not physically descend from a higher position in the way Käthchen does, her shift towards the animalistic drives to hunt and kill is reflected in her transformation into a dog who bites Achilles to death. Despite its gore, this scene shows distinct comical elements, especially in juxtaposition with Achilles's deerlike behavior. Considering that Penthesilea is a tragedy, in which both protagonists end a savage death, it succeeds in breaching the boundaries of genre classification through the inclusion of physical comic elements localized in the broken bodies. Kleist is thus using these bodies to play with, criticize and even undermine conceptual frameworks.

[121] See *KA* 4.1: 109ff, especially 111 and 112.

Throughout the plays, Kleist combines principles of these theoretical concepts of the comic – the theory of incongruity, mechanical movement, the sudden release of tension – to create his own theatrical take on them, using the body as a medium of representation. My analysis of the plays, moreover, has elucidated that the physicality is not only tied to comical elements, but also shows a distinct form of materialized irony, an irony that transgresses the boundaries of language and that assumes a physical shape in fragmented and broken bodies. The bodies in these dramas present and perform an explicit form of ironic fragmentation. Their injuries, cracks, gaps, and the missing pieces of their attire are forms of physical ruptures. These ruptures, whether self-inflicted or involuntarily, also demonstrate a force, a potential to challenge existing aesthetic frameworks, or social or political orders.

In the arena of sociopolitical critique, the investigations of *Der zerbrochne Krug* as well as *Penthesilea* have yielded particularly useful insight. In Kleist's *Krug*, we see that this physical form of irony is not limited to biological bodies. The body of the pitcher, the title, body of the play, and Adam's vestment all serve as examples for ironic fragmentation and permeability. Their fragmentation, moreover, appears to be proliferating: Adam's wounds are multiplying throughout the play and the closer one looks at the play itself, more and more holes appear. Like the different forms of irony that spin out of control in Schlegel's ironic text *Über die Unverständlichkeit*, the physical irony resulting from the fragmentation of the bodies in Kleist's drama often proliferates, subverting wholeness and coherence in its wake (*KFSA* 2: 368ff).

With the holes appearing in the body of Adam, who is both judge and guilty party, the physical irony in the play gains a political dimension. His human weakness and guilt on the one hand and the representation of the judicial system through his position as a judge on the other are representing an underlying incongruity. Through the fragmentations (the injuries Adam sustained

during his flight from Eve's room) and the gaps in his vestment (the missing wig that reveals his badly wounded head), Adam's body performs incoherence in the legal system. As a result, the power structure of the political system is revealed as flawed. Adam's attempts to cover up his offence fail and he fails to maintain the image of an intact power structure. It is through the relentlessly disruptive force of irony, the physical ironic fragmentation, that the cracks in the system surface and become apparent.

By focusing on the pitcher as the second body of evidence in the *Krug*, the present analysis assumed a different perspective than that with which previous scholarship had interpreted the play. Though each body individually performs the kind of physical irony that this study discussed, the juxtaposition of the two broken bodies proved decidedly constructive in the context of physical irony: not only are both bodies fragmented and permeable but they also break during in the same incident – so closely linked are these two bodies, that in the moment of their cracking or jumping, as we have seen, one cannot clearly distinguish one break from the other.

With Marthe's account at the center of the analysis of the pitcher as an ironic body, this study has shown that it is through her that the readers and audience of the play learn about the conflicting states of the structural integrity of the titular jug: a pitcher with just a hole in it is at the same time completely shattered to pieces (compare *ZK* 7, line 649 with 7, line 648, or 9, line 1334). Her description also fills the gaps of the broken pitcher in front of our inner eye. Through her account, the pitcher appears both broken and whole at the same time, maintaining a paradoxical state of brokenness and wholeness. In the end, the interpretation of Marthe's account not only showed that her covering up of the holes can be read as her maintaining the paradox of the broken pitcher but, through her description, Kleist also visualizes for his readers and audience the idea that she is doing her part in maintaining the illusion, a functioning power

structure that in truth is broken. He is giving us an example of how also members of the public contribute to keeping up the image of a broken system.

Penthesilea exhibits a similar connection between physical irony and a political context. Right from the very founding of the Amazon state, the female warriors fragmented their own bodies by cutting off their breasts. This part of the study considered two main aspects linked to this fragmentation: on the one hand, a connection of the body of the state with the bodies of the Amazons and on the other hand, a quality of self-infliction in the fragmentation. Although the first two dramas had shown bodily fragmentations that were the result of voluntary jumps or accidental falls, they were not intentionally inflicted. As the discussion of *Penthesilea* showed, it is constructive to consider different qualities of physical irony and recognize voluntary and involuntary irony separately. For the analysis of Penthesilea and Achilles revealed that, while appearing voluntarily, the fragmentation and physical irony represented through the bodies of the protagonists was not entirely based on their decision.

To conclude this dissertation, it should be noted that the consideration of broken and fragmented bodies in the plays of Heinrich von Kleist as representations of a physical comedy and a materialized physical irony, is a decidedly constructive avenue of inquiry that contributes to the understanding of Kleist's theater, his articulation and use of the comic thorough textual and dramatic means, and his development and utilization of an irony that breaches the boundaries of its purely verbal and textual use. As this study showed, physicality and the fragmentation of bodies lie at the center of this approach. The broken body – be it organic or inorganic – performs and reflects comic effects and ironic interruptions.

For this study, the consideration of the body in combination with irony and the comic has proven particularly constructive. It has shown that both irony and the comic are connected in the

aesthetic representation of the injured and fragmented body in Kleist's drama. A further overlap between comedy and irony is evident in the notion of incongruity as it is laid out in the analysis of physical comedy in *Penthesilea* and bodily irony *Der zerbrochne Krug*. The juxtaposition of the descriptions of Achilles's body – a tall and muscular warrior on one hand, and a fragile and skittish animal, hiding behind the bushes on the other – showed an incongruence that is deemed ridiculous and funny, just one example of a physical form of the comic that evokes a humorous effect. The ironic body of Adam, riddled with holes, reflects an incongruity between human weakness and guilt, and the structure of the judicial system that he represents as judge.

This study has considered both physical comedy and bodily irony as Kleist's strategy to comment and critique social, ideological or political structures. Adam's broken body serves as a medium that, through incongruity, through the bodily irony, reflects and performs a critique on flawed political structures, in this case, the judicial structure. He is unsuccessfully trying to maintain the illusion of a system in which the judge and the guilty party cannot be the same. The body of Käthchen, the girl who throws herself onto the cobblestone, breaking both legs, similarly served as an example of Kleist mocking bourgeois values. Theobald's daughter, who, by his account, is the *embodiment* of Schiller's "beautiful soul," throws herself out of a window, both breaking her body (her legs) and breaking with the proclaimed idealistic framework in the process. Thus, as commentary and critique, the bodies in Kleist's plays challenge established social frameworks to the point of subversion.

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- *KVH* *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*, *SW*, pp. 429-531.
- *P* *Penthesilea*, *SW*, pp. 321-428.
- *ZK* *Der zerbrochne Krug*, *SW*, pp. 175-244.

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